



**Doctorado en Administración y Dirección de Empresas
Departamento de Organización de Empresas y Marketing**

TESIS DOCTORAL

**“DESDE EL VALOR DE MARCA BASADO EN EL CONSUMIDOR
AL COMPROMISO DEL CLIENTE EN SERVICIOS
EXPERIENCIALES: ENFOQUE DESDE UNA ECONOMÍA
EMERGENTE”**

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Sevilla, 2021

A Dios, por sobre todas las cosas

A mis padres y hermana, por su amor incondicional

A mis Directores de Tesis, por su apoyo constante

A mis amigos y seres queridos, por ser y estar

AGRADECIMIENTOS

A Dios por darme la vida, y a la Virgen por darme convicción y fuerza para seguir adelante.

A mis padres y hermana por estar siempre a mi lado.

A mis directores de Tesis, Dr. Cambra y Dra. Fuentes, por compartir sus conocimientos y enseñanzas con total entrega y desprendimiento, pero sobre todo por su acompañamiento firme y decidido en todo momento, en especial en los escenarios difíciles que se presentaron en el desarrollo de este proyecto. Mi admiración, respeto y reconocimiento a su calidad humana y profesional. Mi gratitud eterna.

A la Dra. Olavarría por sus invalorable aportes.

A mis verdaderos amigos y seres queridos, que son ángeles que me rodean y acompañan, aquellos quienes de corazón comparten mi alegría y emoción, y que sin importar lo bueno o lo malo de la vida conservaron su fe y confianza en mi persona y me dieron su apoyo total, gracias por ser parte de mi vida y estar junto a mí, compartiendo afecto, aliento, escucha activa y ánimos para afrontar y enfrentar los retos de la vida; y a reconocer que lo que realmente es valioso y trascendente en la vida implica siempre mucho sacrificio, compromiso y una entrega total sin medias tintas.

A las autoridades de la Universidad de Lima y de la Universidad Pablo de Olavide quienes, con visión estratégica y global, crearon este proyecto de formación de Doctorado interinstitucional, gracias por la oportunidad.

Finalmente, gracias a todos quienes me ofrecieron apoyo y aliento.

RESUMEN EN CASTELLANO

Esta tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo examinar el efecto de un grupo de variables relacionadas con el valor de marca basado en el cliente (CBBE) en empresas de servicios con alto contenido experiencial. Se considera el efecto de dos tipos de comunicación en el valor de marca: la controlada por las empresas y la generada por los usuarios. Además, se analiza la posible influencia de estos factores en el nivel de *engagement* de los clientes. Destacar que para desarrollar la investigación empírica se toma como referencia el contexto de una economía emergente: Perú. La consideración de una economía emergente refuerza el valor de las contribuciones de este estudio, dado que hasta el momento todas las investigaciones de referencia se habían basado en economías occidentales desarrolladas.

Inicialmente analizamos estos factores en el sector turístico y se compara la situación antes (capítulo 2) y durante la pandemia del COVID-19 (capítulo 3). Para cumplir con los objetivos propuestos se plantea realizar un estudio cuantitativo basado en un análisis de ecuaciones estructurales. Los datos son obtenidos en base a encuestas que incluyen turistas que visitaron Lima como destino turístico. Las preguntas están basadas en escalas previamente utilizadas en la literatura que han sido validadas al contexto objeto de estudio. Los resultados muestran una cadena de efectos positivos que, a partir de la comunicación, inciden en el valor de marca del destino y llegan a explicar el nivel de *engagement* de los turistas.

En segundo lugar, se propone el mismo modelo en un sector donde el nivel experiencial es mayor: clínicas privadas de salud (capítulo 4). Los datos muestran resultados similares a los obtenidos en el sector turístico, demostrando la robustez del modelo causal propuesto. De esta manera aumenta el margen para generalizar las conclusiones de nuestro estudio.

Esta investigación aporta información relevante para reducir la brecha existente en la literatura asociada al valor de marca basado en el cliente en empresas de servicios experienciales en economías emergentes. Además, a pesar de las dificultades que ha planteado la pandemia del COVID-19, hemos sido capaces de recopilar información en un momento crucial para el sector turístico y convertir esos desafíos en una oportunidad para nuestra investigación (ver capítulo 3). Los resultados de esta tesis presentan implicaciones teóricas y prácticas que se incluyen en la parte final del trabajo de investigación (capítulo 5).

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the scenario of technological development that characterizes our globalized society, marketing strategies have evolved to center around consumers. Hyperconnectivity transforms the dynamics of company-user interaction and communication—building network-based bonds and spawning collaborative relationships in content creation and brand equity assessment. This is even more relevant in the case of experiential service markets, where user expectations and exchange of intangibles are fundamental (Pina and Dias, 2020) —allowing for collection of detailed information both regarding the service and the degree of customer satisfaction.

The dynamics of company-consumer interaction have been transformed with new technologies and access to multiple platforms and channels that facilitate both communication and goods acquisition. Today’s consumers have access to huge amounts of information online, in real time; hence, they are better informed—and much more demanding. In response, customer journey management has evolved towards an omnichannel approach, blending physical and digital channels; the objective being to improve targeting, enhance company-consumer interaction and shore up satisfactory experiences driven by analysis of customer data, preferences and purchase history.

In such a context, our study aims to contribute to knowledge on strategic consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) management in highly experiential service markets. CBBE has been defined as a multidimensional construct based on seminal frameworks proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). The first author establishes that CBBE is the set of assets (such as perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, and brand image) adding or taking value away from the customer who will be willing to repeat their experiences. Keller (1993, p. 2) defines CBBE as “*the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand*” that occurs “*when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory*”, combining cognitive aspects (beliefs) and affective attributes (feelings).

To this end, we consider two key focal points: on one hand, destination marketing; on the other, brand/reputation management in private healthcare clinics, based on the impact of controlled/uncontrolled communication on brand equity and corporate reputation—with a view to build emotional bonds that shore up feelings of loyalty, trust,

safety and brand engagement. Specifically, we take an emerging economy context as our reference for empirical analysis, revealing a number of peculiarities with respect to developed, Western economies (the reference in the literature to date).

Despite the importance of brand equity and experiential content, from a consumer standpoint, studies on the subject are scarce. Rare exceptions are recent contributions by Ruiz-Real et al. (2020)—confirming destination brand as a key research area and powerful instrument for shoring up tourist destination positioning—and Sarker et al. (2019), who propose a conceptualization of *customer-based service brand equity* (CBSBE), underscoring the importance of direct service experiences in the airline sector.

With this gap in the literature in mind—and a view to contribute to strategic CBBE management—we present a study built around three key axes: impact of controlled/uncontrolled communication (Study 1); effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector (Study 2); and private healthcare clinic users (Study 3). Together, the three studies will allow us to assess a range of different stakeholder standpoints and perceptions in the context of an unprecedented health crisis; moreover, we will discover important implications for effective CBBE management—the specific objective being to contribute to positive outcomes in highly experiential service-sector markets.

Traditional company-consumer interaction was abruptly disrupted and transformed in the inconceivable scenario brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic—a reality that has underscored the importance of not only guaranteeing satisfactory user experiences but of shoring up safety via effective prevention protocols, building better communication and listening spaces, fostering direct interaction through digital media, enhancing corporate image and nurturing customer satisfaction, loyalty and engagement.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The focus of our research is summarized in the following questions:

- Does electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication via social media impact the corporate reputation of experiential service companies?
- Does DMO-controlled (Destination Management Organization) communication impact destination brand equity and tourist-company relationships?

- To what extent does destination image have a positive impact on perceived destination quality during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How does perceived safety positively impact perceived destination quality during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Does brand equity in highly experiential service contexts (e.g. private healthcare clinics) drive greater customer engagement in a pandemic scenario?
- Does healthcare sector CBBE have a positive impact on degree of satisfaction and corporate reputation-building in health crisis contexts?

This research contributes to the knowledge regarding controlled/uncontrolled communication and its impact on brand equity—together with the role experiences and emotions play. Moreover, in the specific context of the tourism sector, our study examines how destination image and degree of perceived safety impact perceived destination quality—with a view to propose actions aimed at recovering tourism activity in a COVID-19 scenario. Finally, CBBE is analyzed in the context of a highly experiential service market (i.e., private healthcare clinics), including an assessment of the impact on customer engagement.

Our research is carried out in metropolitan Lima, Peru's capital city. Peru is classified as an emerging economy, according to the Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) annual classification based on principal stock indices (2020). Lima, in turn, provides an attractive context for service company creation and development.

1.3 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The first part of our research—Study 1—provides an in-depth analysis of provides an in-depth analysis of CBBE in an emerging economy tourist destination setting. We use data for tourists arriving in Lima prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. The impact of the social web on management in a sector as competitive as travel and tourism is undeniable; social media technology has literally revolutionized the way company-customer relationships are conceived and handled. Moreover, together, social networks and search platforms put more information at consumers' finger tips than ever before

regarding competing service portfolios—equipping travelers to compare, contrast and make more educated attribute-based decisions.

Tourists today have access to a wide range of information: from real-time accommodation availability, characteristics and prices to a spectrum of opinions, perceptions and experiences with regard to the destination or establishment in question provided by other travelers themselves. This means tourism firms and DMOs are no longer the sole sources of information impacting brand equity and potential consumer behavior; a powerful new communication channel has entered the scene—a priori, spontaneous and uncontrolled—connecting travelers globally and displaying enormous potential for impacting final decisions. Moreover, the literature indicates that, since it is not sponsored or controlled, information received through social media channels garners a higher level of trust among consumers, (e.g., Karakaya and Barnes, 2010).

In the specific case of the travel and tourism sector, management of certain intangible elements helps shape destination brand image: the quality that consumers perceive and communicate through different channels—and certain degrees of destination loyalty—can be understood as factors linked to brand equity (Bianchi et al., 2014; Kladou and Kehagias, 2014). Finally, authors like Vivek et al. (2012) and van Doorn et al. (2010) indicate that consumers tend to feel more connectedness to the brand when they perceive positive relationship outcomes. In travel and tourism contexts, then, we can expect brand equity to have a positive impact on customer engagement (Ahn and Back, 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017; Hudson et al., 2015).

Our second study aims to shed light on how destination image and perceived safety impact perceived destination quality in a COVID-19 context—allowing for proposing actions aimed at tourism destination recovery. Perceived quality can also impact tourist loyalty to a destination, as well as their degree of engagement—understood as a set of value-adding transactional and non-transactional behaviors (van Doorn et al., 2010); both loyalty and engagement are outcomes which stand to contribute considerable present and future value to a destination.

The myriad challenges of a post-pandemic world are magnified in emerging economies like Peru, since they tend to lag behind in terms of quality healthcare infrastructures. Moreover, tourism is often essential to a basic income for the local population—making emerging economies even more susceptible to fallout from major

disasters like COVID-19. In the specific case of Lima, area hotels were driven to fundamentally transform their services in a sector-wide reorganization effort involving widespread incorporation of automation technologies (Ivanov et al., 2020); innovation and digitization of processes were deemed essential to remaining competitive. In such a context, the challenge is to foster positive perceptions of the destination brand—projecting an image of safety and preservation of visitors’ health and integrity. These actions should harmonize closely with government policies and coordinated international efforts to implement protocols designed both to contain the pandemic and shore up visitors’ sense of safety.

Tourism and hospitality service providers are hardest hit in health emergency scenarios like the COVID-19 pandemic (Hall, 2020; Kim et al., 2020). The surge in travel restrictions worldwide and other health safety protocols have plunged the sector into an unforeseen reality—and up against a sea of new challenges tourist destinations now face. In this context, our second study takes the shape of an exploratory analysis of how destination image and perceived safety impact perceived quality in an emerging economy (Lima, Peru); and the extent to which tourists’ perceptions of destination quality have an impact on destination loyalty and degree of engagement.

Our third study examines the links between CBBE and customer engagement in a highly experiential services market; specifically, the case of private healthcare clinics in Lima, Peru during a pandemic that triggered widespread alarm. Competitive realities in Lima’s healthcare sector at the time of the outbreak pressed managers to change their approach, to become much more receptive and empathetic to consumer expectations—directly engaging them both cognitively and affectively in doctor-patient dynamics, nurturing closeness and building interpersonal bonds. In view of the crisis, and placing protection of human life at the forefront of healthcare policy, remote care was implemented to avoid massive, involuntary infection. Those clinics that were receptive and adapted effectively to a difficult, complex scenario (due to pervasive insecurity and risk of contagion)—ensuring patient safety through established protocols while maintaining quality of care—were successful at channeling the benefits of CBBE, hence positively impacting corporate reputation, customer satisfaction and engagement.

Analyzing a sample of patient opinions regarding private healthcare services, we confirm that CBBE has a decisive impact on both customer satisfaction and corporate

reputation. These findings are in line with Lee et al. (2020), Sürücü et al. (2019) and Brady et al. (2008), among others.

On the whole, our findings can be explained by level of decision-associated risk—when it comes to personal health, consumers tend to be very engaged. In this sense, factors like brand equity and reputation determine healthcare provider positioning; which, in turn, can have a significant impact on decision-making. The novelty and interest of our research are enhanced by the fact that it was carried out in an emerging economy context. In many developing countries, the healthcare system has collapsed due to an avalanche of COVID-19 patients; and factors like use of new technologies or adoption of respectful, patient-centered care policies—pillars of private healthcare—are having a positive impact on customer opinions (Traiki et al., 2020). This underscores the fact that any point of contact or interaction with users is an opportunity to boost brand equity, reinforce reputation and strengthen customer-company bonds.

In times of health crises, like the current pandemic, private clinics have the opportunity to boost the differential value of their brand through empathic, supportive action—i.e., via the implementation of a set of experiences that foster an emotional connection and project the role of managers as being service-oriented and committed to the quest for the common good.

1.3.1 Study 1

Our first study analyzes the extent to which communication—both controlled and uncontrolled—has an impact on destination brand equity and engagement in the tourism sector. DMO-controlled communication is the conventional variety of this marketing variable; traditionally, the firms determine the platform, communication channels and investment mix when interacting with the market. Hence, we can expect a positive relationship linking tourists' perceptions of controlled communication and dimensions of *customer-based destination brand equity* (CBD BE). Uncontrolled communication, on the other hand, allows customers to communicate both positive and negative content—beyond the control of companies (Eisingerich et al., 2014). Our findings show that uncontrolled communication also has a significant impact on CBD BE dimensions.

Both controlled and uncontrolled communication have a significant impact on tourist perceptions and destination image. We are no longer talking only about controlling channels and messaging, however; today's firms are to some extent at the mercy of customer opinions. Hence, the significant relationship linking DMO-controlled content and tourists suggests that social media is a key player in terms of creating positive cognitive-affective images of the destination.

1.3.2 Study 2

Our second study was carried out in a pandemic context. Zenker and Kock (2020) identify potential disruptions in destination image as an interesting line of research—based on the premise that COVID-19 itself and/or different ways of managing the pandemic may be impacting aspects like destination quality and perceived safety. Moreover, perceived destination quality can significantly impact tourist loyalty and degree of with a destination.

In this vein, Kock et al. (2016) define destination image as tourists' cognitive-affective associations vis-à-vis a tourist destination. These authors postulate that standard destination characteristics are not the only factors that contribute to destination image; significant recent events play a role as well. In a health crisis scenario, for instance, perceived destination safety has a major impact. Conventional thinking conceives of perceived quality as an overall appraisal of a destination's quality—based on travelers' perceptions regarding facilities, furnishings and other intangible aspects. Loyalty is understood from the perspective of repetition—intention to return and/or recommend to other tourists. Finally, customer engagement refers to a mental state of bonding with a tourist destination that goes beyond the merely transactional (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020).

1.3.3 Study 3

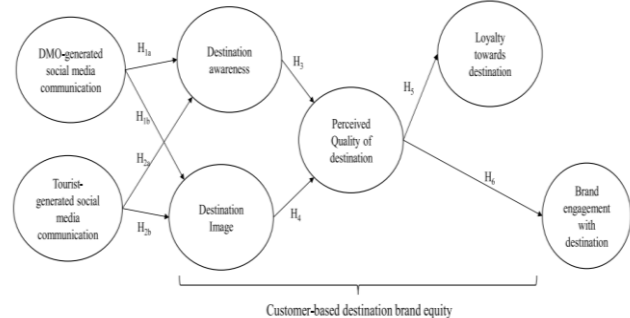
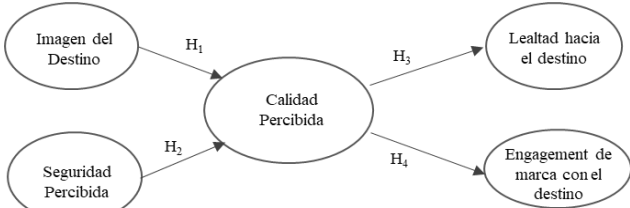
Healthcare is a top priority for most people (Campbell et al., 2020). Our third study analyzes brand equity management in the private healthcare sector—more specifically, how it relates to perceived customer satisfaction, corporate reputation and

customer engagement in a pandemic context. From a consumer behavior standpoint, both how a purchase is perceived and the overall user experience are essential to understanding degree of customer satisfaction (e.g., Hernández-Ortega and Franco 2019). CBBE reflects how consumers think and feel about a brand (Datta et al., 2017); hence, we propose that CBBE drives a chain of effects impacting corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and engagement. Authors like Babin and James (2010), and Hau (2019), indicate that antecedents of service provision help explain both patients' decisions and perceived outcomes—also impacting service provider positioning and provider-user relationships down the line.

Our findings show that private healthcare clinic CBBE has a decisive impact on both corporate reputation and degree of customer satisfaction. To the extent that brand equity contributes to a solid corporate reputation, it is key to reducing the risk of adverse selection (Radojevic et al., 2015).

Table 1.1 provides general objectives for this Doctoral Thesis, together with the conceptual framework and key highlights of each of the three studies comprising the present research.

Table 1.1: Objectives of the Doctoral Thesis

	Research Objectives	Conceptual Framework
Doctoral Thesis <i>From customer-based brand equity (CBBE) to customer engagement in experiential services: insights from an emerging economy</i>	We aim to analyze—for experiential service providers in emerging economy contexts—the impact of communication on CBBE, on one hand, and of corporate reputation on relational outcomes, on the other.	CBBE ► Customer satisfaction/ corporate reputation ► Customer Engagement
Study 1 <i>The interplay between social media communication, brand equity and brand engagement in tourist destinations: the emerging economy context</i>	Our goal is to identify how both DMO-controlled and tourist-generated communication impact emerging destination brand equity and relational outcomes.	 <pre> graph LR DMO[DMO-generated social media communication] -- H1a --> DA[Destination awareness] DMO -- H1b --> DI[Destination Image] Tourist[Tourist-generated social media communication] -- H2a --> DA Tourist -- H2b --> DI DA -- H3 --> PQD((Perceived Quality of destination)) DI -- H4 --> PQD PQD -- H5 --> LT[Loyalty towards destination] PQD -- H6 --> BE[Brand engagement with destination] subgraph CBBE [Customer-based destination brand equity] DA DI PQD end </pre>
Study 2 <i>Tourism destination recovery in an emerging economy: impact of destination image and perceived safety during the COVID-19 pandemic</i>	The aim is to analyze how perceived safety and destination image impact perceived quality; also, to determine the extent to which perceived quality can impact destination loyalty and degree of engagement. Our reference is the COVID-19 pandemic context.	 <pre> graph LR ID[Imagen del Destino] -- H1 --> CP((Calidad Percibida)) SP[Seguridad Percibida] -- H2 --> CP CP -- H3 --> LH[Lealtad hacia el destino] CP -- H4 --> EM[Engagement de marca con el destino] </pre>

	Research Objectives	Conceptual Framework
Study 3 <i>Customer-based brand equity and customer engagement in experiential services: insights from an emerging economy</i>	<p>We aim to analyze consumer perceptions regarding brand equity in highly experiential service contexts (private health clinics); also, identify the extent to which CBBE drives a chain of positive effects impacting customer satisfaction, corporate reputation and customer engagement.</p>	<pre> graph LR BA((Brand awareness)) -.-> CBBE((Customer-based brand equity CBBE)) BI((Brand image/association)) -.-> CBBE PSQ((Perceived service quality)) -.-> CBBE BL((Brand loyalty)) -.-> CBBE CBBE -- H1 --> CS((Customer Satisfaction)) CBBE -- H2 --> CR((Corporate reputation)) CS -- H3 --> CR CS -- H4 --> CE((Customer engagement)) CR -- H5 --> CE </pre> <p>The diagram illustrates the conceptual framework for Study 3. It shows four antecedent factors (Brand awareness, Brand image/association, Perceived service quality, and Brand loyalty) influencing Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) via dashed arrows. CBBE then influences Customer Satisfaction (H1) and Corporate reputation (H2) via solid arrows. Customer Satisfaction also influences Corporate reputation (H3) and Customer engagement (H4) via solid arrows. Finally, Corporate reputation influences Customer engagement (H5) via a solid arrow.</p>

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**CHAPTER II: THE
INTERPLAY BETWEEN
SOCIAL MEDIA
COMMUNICATION,
BRAND EQUITY AND
BRAND ENGAGEMENT
IN TOURIST
DESTINATIONS**

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Destination tourism has a significant impact on a country's economic development, especially in terms of job creation rates (Liu & Chou, 2016). Hence, management by destination marketing organizations (DMOs) is especially relevant in the case of emerging destinations (De Moya & Jain, 2013). However, as Bianchi, Pike and Lings (2014) point out, enhancing the positive perception of destination branding in this type of destination is markedly difficult. Through place branding—understood as applying product brand management to the destination—DMOs develop strategies aimed at adding value to the brands associated with given tourist destinations. Such strategies focus on factors that enhance tourist perceptions of destination brand equity as a means to attract potential customers and foster current customer loyalty to the destination (Boo, Busser & Baloglu, 2009; Im, Kim, Elliot & Han, 2012). Despite its importance, recent studies indicate that destination brand equity still requires more comprehensive analysis (e.g. Dedeoglu, Van Niekerk, Weinland & Celuch, 2019; Frías, Sabiote, Martín & Beerli, 2018; Herrero, San Martín, García & Collado, 2017).

In order to link positive destination brand perceptions with tourist preferences, tourism organizations should strive to maximize the effectiveness of their communication efforts (Godey, Manthiou, Pederzoli, Rokka, Aiello, Donvito & Singh, 2016). Currently, Web 2.0 -or social web- enjoys widespread acceptance among consumers, in general (Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden, 2016), and tourists in particular (Seric & Gil, 2012), providing easy-access, low-cost communication platforms (King, Racherla & Bush, 2014). This has led to a loss of impact among more traditional communication media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), while the use of social media empowers customers with the ability to publish and share both positive and negative content—hence the power to impact brand reputation through the free expression/exchange of ideas (Eisingerich, Auh & Merlo, 2014). From a business perspective, the social web allows for faster access to a larger volume of customers, permitting on-going interaction with the customer base via active participation in social media channels (Mazzarol, Sweeney & Soutar, 2007).

Given such challenges, response strategies must be developed to face new situations, with a view both to maximize the potential of social media-based interaction and minimize possible negative repercussions (Naumov & Tao, 2017). This is especially complex for DMOs, which—due to a lack of technological experience and human resource, time and financial restrictions—often find it difficult to position themselves

effectively via social media marketing (Mistilis, Buhalis & Gretzel, 2014). Nevertheless, DMOs must be aware of the key role technological innovations play as drivers of business performance, economic growth and social change in emerging countries (Yunis, Tarhini & Kassar, 2018), and of the importance of effectively managing both tourist-generated and company-generated communication through social channels to obtain positive outcomes.

Few studies to date, however, have focused on the impact of social media communication on brand equity perception from the broad perspective of hospitality (e.g. Seric & Gil, 2012; Seric, 2017), or the impact company-generated communication has on destination branding (e.g. de Rosa, Bocci & Dryjanska, 2019; Shao, Li, Morrison & Wu, 2016). Moreover, recent literature also recognizes the potential role that social media plays in the degree of brand engagement (Gómez, López & Molina, 2019)—potentially having a very significant deferred impact on brand equity and profitability (van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pirner & Verhoef, 2010).

In this context, many sectors encounter that merely transferring existing business models and practices from established Western markets is not enough. Such is the case of emerging economies, where some of the most popular DMOs can be found. These markets require greater knowledge of local peculiarities, emerging market idiosyncrasies and consumer behaviors (Gamble, 2010). Yet, surprisingly, research in emerging contexts is scarce.

Therefore, given the interest of both topic and context, the general objective of our study is to identify how both tourist and DMO-generated social media communication affects the brand equity of an emergent destination and how this can affect relational aspects with customers. Our specific objectives are i) to describe the impact contents generated both by DMOs and by tourists themselves have on a hierarchical chain of effects based on a multidimensional customer-based destination brand equity construct, and ii) to show how management of these processes impacts the development of brand engagement with the destination itself. To this end, our empirical study takes Peru—example of an emerging economy—and, more specifically, Metropolitan Lima, an emerging destination, as its reference. More details about these profiles are included in Section 3.

Section 2 provides a review of the literature for the concept of customer-based destination brand equity—together with a set of research hypotheses relating to social media communication's potential impact on destination brand equity and brand engagement with the tourist destination. Following the presentation of methodology and results, the final section of our paper provides a theoretical discussion, key recommendations for management, and conclusions.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.2.1 Customer-based destination brand equity

Since the 1990s, brand equity has been in the research spotlight (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Lassar, Mittal & Sharma, 1995; Simon & Sullivan, 1993)—with special attention being paid to the impact of operational marketing actions that generate added value (Russell & Kamakura, 1994). As these pioneering studies evolved, brand equity was approached from the perspective of the client, under the assumption that brands are only relevant insofar as customers perceive them as such (Kim, Jin-Sun & Kim, 2008). What has come to be termed customer-based brand equity (CBBE) continues to be a focal point in hospitality (e.g. Liu, Wong, Tseng, Chang & Phau, 2017; Sarker, Mohd-Any & Kamarulzaman, 2019; Seric, Gil & Mollá-Descals, 2016) and particularly, in tourist destinations (e.g. Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Frías et al., 2018; Herrero et al., 2017; Liu & Chou, 2016; Wong & Teoh, 2015). In this regard, tourist perceptions with respect to destination brand equity play a major role both in terms of tourist destination characteristics and segmentation as well as in boosting tourist loyalty and the revenue the industry derives from this loyalty (Horng, Liu, Chou & Tsai, 2013).

The literature has given rise to a range of definitions for CBBE, hence, to different multidimensional structures aimed at illustrating the overall meaning of the construct and its adaptation to tourist destination perceptions. Studies in this vein - abundant in the last decade- argue there is an ongoing need for analysis of CBBE creation and intensity, with a view to sort out discrepancies that have surfaced (e.g. Netemeyer, Krishnan, Pullig, Wang, Yagci, Dean, Ricks & Wirth 2004; Nikabandi, Safui & Agheshlouei, 2015; Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2006; Zavattaro, Daspit & Adams, 2015). This call for research is particularly timely and relevant in cases where the destination is conceived of as a brand

from the perspective of CBBE (e.g., Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Gómez, López & Molina, 2015; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). From the consumer's perspective, the destination brand concept has been used similarly to the term destination image (Prebensen, 2007) or place branding (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006), and customer-based destination brand equity (CBDBE), understood as tourist perceptions driving loyalty to the destination, serving as motivation for the trip (Keller, Parameswaran & Jacob, 2011), and not limited to the destination image alone (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri & Kurtulus, 2010).

The majority of studies measuring CBDBE performance propose a multidimensional structure based on Aaker's seminal proposals on CBBE (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993). Aaker argues that brand equity is the set of assets adding or taking value away from the customer; in other words, consumers will perceive the brand as adding value to the product when associating a product with a brand. Aaker (1991) concludes that, while multiple aspects are involved in generating this kind of brand-driven added value, factors such as perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations (known as brand image), as well as the intention to pay a higher price for a given brand, can generate brand loyalty and indicate successful brand management. Keller (1993, p. 2), on the other hand, approaches CBBE as a process occurring "*when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory*", combining cognitive aspects (beliefs) and affective attributes (feelings).

Based on Keller's proposal (1993), the literature analyzing tourist perceptions of destination brand equity has proposed three types of studies: models proposing global measurement of CBDEB as a global higher order construct comprising the dimensions of brand equity (e.g. Frías et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2015; Wong & Teoh, 2015)—or analyzing the impact of these dimensions (e.g. Gómez et al., 2018; Im et al., 2012; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014); models analyzing the antecedents and impact on global measurement of destination brand equity or on any of its dimensions (e.g. Chi, Huang & Nguyen, 2019; Dedeoglu, Taheri, Okumus & Gannon, 2020; Llodrà-Riera, Martínez- Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015; Liu & Chou, 2016; Rodríguez-Molina, Frías, Del Barrio-García & Castañeda-García, 2019); and studies proposing hierarchical relationships between destination brand equity dimensions (e.g. Bianchi et al., 2014; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Herrero et al., 2017). In response to the challenges posed in the most recent literature, in this study we propose a hierarchical structure of relations between the most

notable dimensions of CBDEB—coupled with an analysis of the role of communication as an antecedent to these factors, and how perceptions regarding destination brand equity can impact vital consequences like brand engagement.

One of the most thoroughly analyzed CBDBE dimensions is destination brand image (e.g., Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Frías et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2015; Pike & Bianchi, 2016) identified as one of the main factors influencing perception of destination brand equity. Despite a general lack of consensus regarding how to define brand image (Gómez et al., 2015), there is some agreement to conceptualize the concept at the consumer level, based on customer perceptions and their interpretation.

At the destination level, Cai (2002, p. 723) understand destination brand image as *"perceptions about the place as reflected by the associations held in tourist memory"*, combining affective and cognitive structures (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gómez et al., 2015). Proper assessment of destination brand image can have a significant, positive impact on tourist behavior: recommending the destination or returning for a visit down the road, for example. However, as Pike and Bianchi (2016) point out, there is no clear consensus regarding construct measurement. In the present study, in line with Boo et al. (2009) and Gómez et al. (2015), we will delimit destination brand image to the tourist- based social and self-image component, combining beliefs and feelings.

Brand awareness is another key dimension widely used in global measurement of CBDE in hospitality (Liu et al., 2017; Seric et al., 2016), specifically, in the tourist destination context (e.g., Boo et al., 2009; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike & Bianchi, 2016). Most studies on the concept propose a hierarchical relationship between the defining dimensions of CBDBE. Brand awareness emerges once tourists have initiated the learning process and acquired knowledge about the brand. Finally, brand attractiveness is originated. Given its similarity to brand image, the literature shows how destination brand awareness is related to both destination image (Herrero et al., 2017) and destination brand association (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). Other authors, however, propose different relationships in their hierarchical structure, only pointing toward the impact of destination brand awareness on destination brand loyalty (Bianchi et al., 2014; Im et al., 2012), and CBDBE (Frías et al., 2018; Gómez, Fernández, Molina & Aranda, 2018).

A well-known brand can be perceived as offering good or bad quality (Im et al., 2012). While DMOs usually consider that they offer high quality products and services, it is not common to gauge tourist perceptions with regard to destination brand quality; DMOs tend to take into account perceived quality instead (Zavattaro et al., 2015). This may be because brand quality and customer perceived quality are often used as synonyms (Pike & Bianchi, 2016). Perceived quality is defined as *"the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority"* (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3). This global consumer judgment regarding the destination brand is based both on associations with said brand and brand strength (Aaker, 1996), in reference to perceived quality of the facilities and intangible aspects of tourist destinations (Boo et al., 2009; Lassar et al., 1995). In this sense, Low and Lamb (2000) argue the importance of quality, both in the creation of strong brands and destination selection.

Although the relationship between perceived quality and loyalty has been widely demonstrated in the consumer behavior and service marketing literature, gaps still exist in terms of understanding how management of perceived brand quality builds brand loyalty from an attitudinal perspective (Zavattaro et al., 2015). In the tourism context we analyze, measuring the attitudinal dimension of the destination brand is more appropriate than looking at visit repetition (behavioral component of loyalty). Destination brand loyalty refers to the intent to visit and recommend (Bianchi et al., 2014; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Im et al., 2012; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Pike & Bianchi, 2016).

The previous arguments far highlight the multidimensional nature of CBDDBE and the existence of certain discrepancies, both in the approach to the dimensions and the hierarchical relations between them. Given this situation, and based on the seminal work of Aaker (1991), we propose analysis of a chain of relationships between the dimensions of CBDDBE such as destination awareness, destination image, perceived destination quality and destination loyalty—with a view to determine how CBDDBE is affected by social media communication and, in turn, how it impacts destination brand engagement.

2.2.2 Impact of social media communication on destination brand equity

Recent studies have focused on social network-generated communication content, with emphasis on the role of Web 2.0 (de Rosa et al., 2019; Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2016). These two-way technologies allow for new forms of interaction, providing opportunities

for communicating products and services and disseminating information virally via the Internet—hence, influencing consumer perceptions regarding brands—gathering knowledge about target audiences (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015) and boosting consumer loyalty. Likewise, the social web allows users to create and share content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), making for a more reliable form of communication (Karakaya & Barnes, 2010). All considered, social network technology generates multiple benefits driving positive perception of the brand—making it paramount to encourage research aimed at guiding digital marketers (Hudson et al., 2016) and, more specifically, DMOs (Mistilis et al., 2014; Shao et al., 2016).

To date, there has been little research on the impact of company-generated social media communications on CBBE (Godey et al., 2016, Pike & Bianchi, 2016), with some notable exceptions focusing on the effect of integrated marketing communications in hospitality (Seric & Gil, 2012; Seric, 2017) and tourism destination contexts (de Rosa et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019). Moreover, DMO use of Web 2.0 applications during tourist stays is clearly insufficient (Shao et al., 2016). Social media channels provide innumerable opportunities for companies to build relationships with customers via online social network communities (Kelly, Kerr & Drennan, 2010)—transforming the impact of such channels on CBBE. Company-generated communication content blends several approaches and impact will depend on message sentiment, customer response and the innate disposition of consumers towards social media (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janaliraman & Kannan, 2016). In this vein, Bruhn et al. (2012) establish that while traditional media has a greater impact on brand awareness, social web communication will have a greater influence on brand image. Hence, it is important to understand how consumers assimilate all of the messages they receive via different communication channels—and how they respond in terms of brand equity perception. Rodríguez-Molina (2019). Godey et al. (2016) demonstrate how social media-based marketing efforts have a direct, significant, positive impact on brand awareness and brand image as metrics for CBBE. These arguments have been shored up as well by recent studies focused on the tourist destination. Dedeoglu et al. (2020) analyze the impact of social media on destination brand awareness, concluding that organizations should invest in this kind of communication with a view to grow and enhance their knowledge of potential consumers. Along these lines, Stojanovic, Andreu and Currás-Pérez (2018)

confirm the significant relationship linking intensity of communication and the brand by way of social media-driven awareness when choosing a travel destination.

Hence, based on the fundamentals of marketing and brand communication—and in our quest to explain how tourists assimilate information—we propose that positive perception of DMO-generated social media content has a significant, positive impact on these two key dimensions of CBDBE:

H1: DMO-generated social media communication exerts a significant, positive impact on tourist perception of destination awareness (H_{1a}) and destination image (H_{1b}).

From a business practice perspective, the potential generated by tourists themselves via social media is recognized (Dedeoglu et al., 2020; Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). There is a large volume of literature analyzing—in tourism marketing contexts and from the perspective of the client—the impact of user-generated content (UGC) and online word-of-mouth (eWOM) on final travel plans (Black & Kelley, 2009; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). Research looking at the impact of eWOM on destination decisions is scarce, however (Sicilia, Pérez & Heffernan, 2008). Several authors point out that customer dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth (NWOM) affect reputation because clients express disappointment triggered by poor-quality care or lack of compliance with corporate commitments (Chang, Wong, Wang & Cho, 2015; Dixit, Badgaiyan & Khare, 2019). Complaints and claims made via eWOM can generate high-magnitude reputational impact and fatal consequences for CBBE. The probability of a reputational fracture occurring has risen, then, due to the existence of new communication channels (Ji, Li, North & Liu, 2017).

That said, companies should make the most of social media analysis tools to better understand the inherent dynamism of user-generated content (UGC)—and to determine what information is important to their customers (Diga & Kelleher, 2009). In short, UGC's potential to transmit favorable opinions and positively impact brand equity should not be overlooked (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). This argument has been tested in several studies analyzing the impact of tourist-generated social media content on CBBE dimensions. While Llodrà-Riera et al (2015) argue that tourist-generated content significantly influences how destination image is constructed, more recent studies make

the case that UGC has an impact on destination awareness (e.g. Dedeoglu et al., 2020; Stojanovic et al., 2018).

Hence, the impact user-generated social media communication exerts on CBDBE does not take into account the potential for organizational control (Christodoulides & Jevons, 2011); companies are equipped to exert powerful, persuasive influence over CBDE (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015) with some degree of ease and vigor (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013). In this light, we put forth our second hypothesis:

H2: Tourist-generated social media communication exerts a significant, positive impact on tourist perception of destination awareness (H_{2a}) and destination image (H_{2b}).

Destination awareness and destination image dimensions are the foundation of our hierarchical stage's proposal, as tourists will evaluate destination brand equity by way of several factors—destination quality, value and loyalty—and compare their perceptions with the mental associations they hold with respect to said destination (Dedeoglu et al., 2019). In most CBDEB modeling, both dimensions have been proposed at the same level, as antecedents to other key factors (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2014; Boo et al., 2019; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Im et al., 2012)—seen as fostering tourist loyalty and, therefore, enhancing tourism and hospitality sector business outcomes (Kim et al., 2008).

From the associative network model standpoint, destination awareness can be understood as the strength of bond with the destination brand node in the mind of tourists (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). If we apply Aaker's proposal (1996), this translates as tourists' ability to recognize and remember given destinations (Gómez et al., 2015). Greater brand reputation/ awareness is expected to have a positive impact on consumer quality perceptions (Dodds et al., 1991). This relationship has been widely analyzed in the context of consumer goods, as brand awareness favors confidence in the product, reducing uncertainty and perceived risk. That said, the literature on the relationship linking destination awareness/ perceived quality and destination is very scarce to date, as Herrero et al. (2017) note. Pike, Bianchi, Kerr and Patti (2010) contrast how brand salience—understood as degree of destination awareness—has a significant impact on perceptions of destination quality.

From a cognitive standpoint, destination image refers to tourist beliefs regarding the functional characteristics they find attractive (Horng et al., 2013). In other words, when tourists hold a positive image of a destination, they are expected to associate it with positive expectations regarding quality—which will be contrasted with their combined perceptions of products, services and experiences. However, as Konecnik & Gartner (2007) point out, despite the key role perceived quality plays in global destination assessment—and the significant impact such perceptions have on future tourist behavior—much of the CBDBE literature fails to contemplate this variable due to the operational hurdle's destination quality presents.

Based on the above arguments, we propose the following hypotheses as the starting point for the chain of effects linking CBDEB dimensions:

H3: Destination awareness by the tourist exerts a significant, positive impact on perceived destination quality.

H4: Destination image perceived by the tourist exerts a significant, positive impact on perceived destination quality.

The positive impact perceptions of quality have on brand loyalty has been tested extensively in the service marketing literature, especially in the context of hospitality (Liu et al., 2017). With respect to tourist destinations, quality refers to perceptions regarding the quality of attributes such as infrastructure, accommodation, cleaning and security (Bianchi et al., 2014). Such perceptions play a fundamental role, due to their impact on tourist behavior (Kim, Holland & Han, 2013)—equipping DMOs with entry barriers with which to block new competitors (Zavattaro et al., 2015). If we understand destination quality perceptions as tourists' global assessment of the product, it seems appropriate to assume a positive relationship linking destination quality and destination loyalty (Bianchi et al., 2014; Herrero et al., 2017). Hence, we propose our fifth research hypothesis:

H5: Perceived destination quality by the tourist exerts a significant, positive impact on loyalty towards destination.

2.2.3 Impact of brand equity on brand engagement with destination

Customer engagement (CE) is defined as “customers' behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 254). According to Thakur (2018), engagement is a mental state indicating frequent customer interaction with, and a degree of commitment to, the focal object (i.e. brand or company). Engagement drives relationships beyond transactions (Kumar & Nayak, 2018); in fact, the literature indicates that CE helps build robust long-term relationships and has an impact on outcomes beyond repurchase—including posting of “likes” and reviews online, and co-creation of products and services (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011a, 2011b; Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel, 2009). Hence, CE allows us to explain interactive consumer-brand relationships (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014). Vivek, Beatty, Dalela and Morgan (2014) adopt a broad vision of CE, integrating conscious attention, enthusiastic participation and social connection—all of which are driven and determined by the degree to which customer relationships, in our case with the tourist destination, are positive.

The term *brand engagement* (BE) arises in direct connection to the concept of customer engagement (Dwivedi, 2015). Vivek et al. (2014) define BE as *level of interaction and connections between consumers and the brand*. Brand engagement has evolved as the new brand relationship variable (Dwivedi, 2015; Raïes, Mühlbacher, & Gavard-Perret, 2015). As authors such as Kumar and Nayak (2018), Wong and Merrilees (2015) or Dwivedi (2015) indicate, BE acts as a channel through which customers develop passion and involvement with the brand, build commitment towards the brand relationship, and incorporate individual disposition in relation to the brand.

CE comprises a set of brand-related interactions beyond financial transactions (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017; Hollebeek, 2011) involving sharing and exchanging ideas, thoughts, and feelings about experiences with the brand with other customers of the brand (Ahn & Back, 2018; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012)—normally as a result of positive experiences (Raïes et al., 2015; van Doorn et al., 2010). In this sense, an understanding of how customer experiences and perceived quality serve as a catalyst for high customer engagement—hence, better business outcomes—is essential (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Thakur, 2016). Post-choice evaluative judgments rooted in a global evaluation of all aspects making up customer relationships (Homburg & Giering, 2001) with tourist destinations—and their experiences while there—will drive perceived

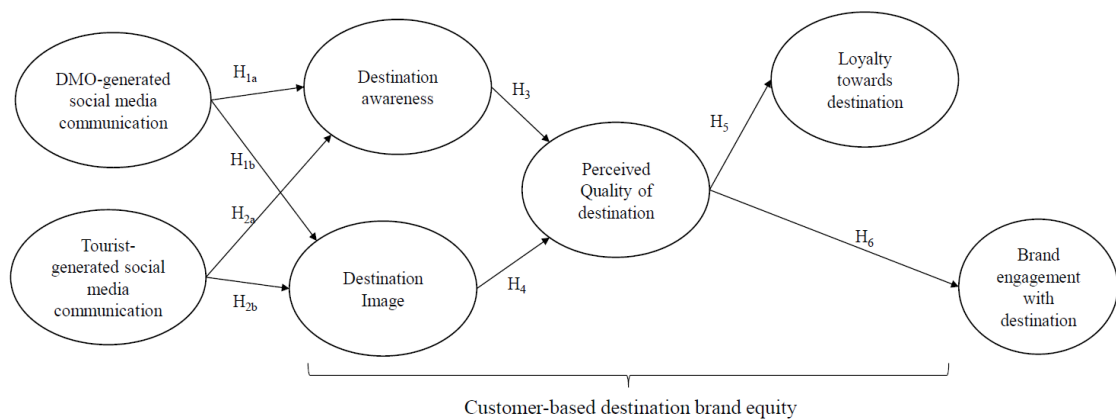
quality levels (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Dijkmans, Kerkhof & Beukeboom, 2015); hence, tourists will feel more closely connected to the destinations in question (Ahn & Back, 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017; Hudson, Roth, Madden & Hudson 2015).

Given the strength of these arguments, we propose the last hypothesis in our reference model:

H6: Perceived quality of destination exerts a significant, positive impact on destination brand engagement.

Figure 2.1 shows the relationships proposed in our hypotheses, taking the established hierarchical relationships structure of CBDBE into account.

Figure 2.1 Proposed theoretical model



Source: The author

2.3 METHODOLOGY

2.3.1 Peru and Metropolitan Lima

Empirical research was carried out in Metropolitan Lima (Peru), an emerging tourism destination context. Peru has been classified as an emerging economy according to the annual Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) ranking based on the most important stock indexes (2019). Table 2.1 shows a comparison between some countries in terms of Income p/ capita and Human Development Index (HDI). According to International Monetary Fund (2017) Peru shows an income p/ capita of 6,199 \$ and ranks 87th in the world. More, according to UN HDI rankings for 2018, USA's economy ranks 7th in the world (HDI = 0.924); Peru's economy ranks a distant 89th (HDI = 0.750).

Table 2.1: Country comparisons*

Country	Income p/capita (ranking)	HDI (ranking)
USA	59,501 \$ (7)	0,924
Canada	45,077 \$ (17)	0.926 (12)
Germany	44,550 \$ (18)	0.936 (5)
Spain	28,359 \$ (31)	0,891 (26)
Hong-Kong	46,109 \$ (15)	0.933 (7)
India	1,983 \$ (142)	0.640 (130)
Peru	6,199 \$ (87)	0.750 (89)

Source: The author

* Per capita income figures are based on data from the International Monetary Fund (2017); HDI is based on data from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018).

In its annual study, the World Travel and Tourism Council (2018) published key projected figures for Latin America—indicating that *the direct contribution of the Travel and Tourism sector to the GDP of the region was very relevant in 2017 (127.4 billion USD, upwards of 3%), predicting an increase of 3.4% in 2018, and that the trend will likely continue at least through 2028*. In such a context, the evolution of key tourism-sector benchmarks allows us to consider Peru, in general, and Lima in particular, as an emerging tourist destination—above and beyond Machu Pichu as a consolidated international tourism destination.

Table 2.2 indicates the evolution of the number of hotels, hotel rooms and available beds over the past five years in Peru, according to Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism (MINCETUR) figures for 2019. Moreover, according to the same agency, both number of visitors and overnight stays exhibit ongoing sustainable growth—in comparison with the data from ten years ago being especially significant. Moreover, the number of international tourists has increased throughout: according to data from MINCETUR (2019) the number has gone from 2.1 million tourists, in 2008, to 3.2 million, in 2014, and as high as 4.4 million in 2018. These figures explain the growth in inbound tourism revenue in Peru—going from \$2,396 million USD, in 2008, to \$3,907 million, in 2014, and \$4,895 million in 2018, according to data from the Peruvian Central Reserve Bank.

Table 2.2: Evolution of tourism in Peru

	2008	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
N° hotels (in thousands)	11.4	18.1	19.5	20.6	21.6	22.1
N° rooms (in thousands)	176.8	245.3	260.0	271.8	287.2	296.8
N° available beds (in thousands)	310.3	425.6	451.5	472.3	498.9	516.2
N° visitors (in millions)	24.8	46.4	47.9	50.6	51.9	55.4
N° overnight stays (in millions)	34.2	64.2	65.3	69.5	70.5	73.8
N° international tourists (in millions)	2.1	3.2	3.5	3.7	4.0	4.4
Income from inbound tourism (in millions USD)	2,396	3,907	4,140	4,288	4,574	4,895

Source: MINCETUR and Banco Central de Reserva del Perú (2019)

In this context, Lima has played a leading role. According to data from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2018), Lima is the preeminent travel and tourism destination in Peru. The same agency reports close to 90% of foreign visitors spend at least one night in the Peruvian capital—Lima being gateway to an array of tourist destinations across the country given that the vast majority of international travelers go through Jorge Chavez Airport, major long-haul flight hub for the region. Tables 2.3 and 2.4 show the evolution in a series of key figures over the last five years, positioning Lima as an emerging destination in clear expansion: number of international arrivals at Jorge Chavez airport, available room capacity and number of visitors to main city monuments. These figures follow the same trend at other major Peruvian airports—i.e., Cusco and Nasca—and principal cities: e.g., Cusco, Ica-Nasca, Loreto, Arequipa, Ayacucho and Cajamarca.

Table 2.3: Evolution of tourism figures in Metropolitan Lima

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
N° international travelers (Jorge Chávez Aeropuerto)	1,800,434	1,889,512	2,014,762	2,176,025	2,337,893
N° available rooms	68,386	69,634	69,668	71,417	72,538

Source: MINCETUR (2019)

Table 2.4: Evolution in number of visitors: main Lima monuments

	2016	2017	2018
National Museum of Archeology	162,271	205,134	219,275
Huaca Pucllana	116,754	139,647	168,460

Source: MINCETUR (2019)

Thus, in general terms, Lima is a catalyst for the thriving Peruvian tourism industry, ranking third among South American cities in terms of travel industry revenue/volume—only trailing Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. All of the above has a positive impact on regional economic figures and justifies our research interest in the region—presenting an attractive profile of emerging tourist destination in an emerging economy context.

2.3.2 Procedure

Information was collected through a structured questionnaire written in English and Spanish. The survey was developed by adapting a set of previously selected scales which had been previously tested in the literature (see Appendix 2.I). Each item was measured using a 7-point Likert scale where “1” means “strongly disagree” and “7” means “strongly agree”. Before carrying out the fieldwork, a pre-test was given to 5 expert Spanish and British scholars and 10 tourists of both nationalities to verify that the questionnaire was easily understood. In line with pre-test results, some survey statements were modified in order to improve functionability and adapt the questionnaire to the study context.

The method for collecting information was determined by simple random selection of guests staying in 3, 4 and 5-star hotels in Metropolitan Lima. Prior to commencing fieldwork, permission was requested from area hotels; thirty-eight agreed to participate. The questionnaire was self-administered by trained interviewers in hotel lobbies during mornings and evenings. Fieldwork was carried out between June and October 2018. The final sample comprises 300 tourists, with a sampling error of 0.058 for intermediate proportions ($p=q=0.5$), and infinite population. Sample distribution is compensated by gender (52.3% men; 47.7% women), and age (47% under 35 years of age; 53% over 35 years old). 25% of the sample indicated it was the first time they had visited the destination, while 39.6% indicated it was their second visit. With regard to the

type of trip, 84.7% indicated their main purpose was leisure/ holidays, while the rest (15.3%) reported they were traveling for business/ work.

Statistical analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 and EQS6.2 software to test research hypotheses—in line with Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2013). Measurement scale dimensionality and reliability were verified via EFA/ CFA factor analysis. Correlation between latent constructs was verified to assess a potential higher order between customer-based destination brand equity (CBDDBE) dimensions, following guidelines by Gerbing and Hamilton (1996). Internal consistency was assessed via the composite reliability and variance extracted indices for each measurement model. Likewise, both convergent and discriminant scale validity and potential common bias problems were addressed. Finally, we proceeded to verify our hypotheses through structural equation model estimation.

2.4 RESULTS

2.4.1 Measurement scale dimensionality, reliability and validity

An initial approach to measurement scale dimensionality was carried out by means of an exploratory factorial analysis (EFA), applying the auto-value retention criterion superior to the unit and Varimax rotation. Our results showed the dimensional structure proposed for measurement of the CBDDBE construct, based on the contributions proposed by Boo et al. (2009) and Yoo and Donthu (2001). The measurements of antecedents to CBDDBE (DMO-generated and tourist-generated social media communication) and its consequence (brand engagement) will load to its corresponding latent factor and turn out to be one-dimensional. Regarding refinement of the measurement scales, two items relating to the measurement of perception of service quality were eliminated because they presented a load under 0.6 (Hair et al., 2013). Our results indicate that all dimensions reach optimal levels of reliability, with Cronbach's α indexes above 0.85 (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5 Measurement model estimation (dimensionality, consistency and validity)

Construct	Items	SL (t-value)	R ²	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
DMO-generated social media communication	DCC1	0.895	0.801	0.950	0.950	0.825
	DCC 2	0.897** (32.49)	0.805			
	DCC 3	0.919** (28.30)	0.844			
	DCC 4	0.922** (24.06)	0.851			
Tourist-generated social media communication	UGC1	0.871	0.759	0.933	0.935	0.783
	UGC 2	0.914** (19.31)	0.835			
	UGC 3	0.911** (24.09)	0.831			
	UGC 4	0.841** (22.06)	0.707			
Destination awareness	DAW1	0.733	0.537	0.866	0.873	0.698
	DAW 2	0.921** (16.59)	0.848			
	DAW 3	0.842** (14.49)	0.709			
Perceived quality of destination	PQD1	0.883	0.780	0.896	0.897	0.744
	PQD2	0.875** (18.88)	0.766			
	PQD3	0.828** (12.42)	0.686			
Destination image	DIM1	0.889	0.790	0.927	0.929	0.766
	DIM2	0.905** (26.02)	0.820			
	DIM3	0.890** (23.69)	0.792			
	DIM4	0.813** (13.92)	0.660			
Loyalty towards destination	DLO1	0.869	0.755	0.882	0.885	0.660
	DLO2	0.873** (24.23)	0.762			
	DLO3	0.721** (17.46)	0.519			
	DLO4	0.776** (17.56)	0.602			
Brand engagement with destination	BED1	0.832	0.691	0.894	0.896	0.591
	BED2	0.869** (20.97)	0.755			
	BED3	0.759** (13.68)	0.576			
	BED4	0.766** (18.46)	0.587			
	BED5	0.694** (14.95)	0.482			
	BED6	0.672** (12.67)	0.452			
SL=Standardized loadings; CR=Composite reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted Fit indices:Chi ² _{Sat-Bt} (df=329)=561.05**; Chi ² _{Sat-Bt} /df=1.71; RMSEA=0.049; CFI=0.959 GFI=0.815; BB-NFI=0.909; BB-NNFI=0.953 **Statistical significance at 99%.						

Source: The author

Based on the exploratory dimensionality study, a first-order measurement model was estimated using EQS 6.2 software. In view of the lack of normal multivariate data distribution, the Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation method was used. Fit indices for the model were satisfactory (Chi²_{Sat-Bt}/df=1.71; CFI=0.959; RMSEA=0.049), indicating a good estimate in the proposed chain of relationships. As evidenced in the theoretical framework, there is a degree of discrepancy regarding the dimensional nature of the CBDDBE construct: a number of studies employ global measurements (Im et al., 2012; Wong & Teoh, 2015; Liu & Chou, 2016); other authors treat CBDDBE as a first-order construct (Bianchi et al., 2014; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Herrero et al., 2017; Kladou

& Kehagias, 2014), and still others consider CBDDBE as a higher-order construct (Gómez et al., 2015; Frías et al., 2018; Wong & Teoh, 2015). Faced with this duality, we delved deeper in our analysis of CBDDBE multidimensionality by estimating a higher-order measurement model regarding CBDDBE as a second-order latent factor. Comparing both models, results obtained from the Chi2 difference test show that the higher-order estimate ($\text{Chi2Sat-Bt}/\text{df}=2.14$; $\text{GFI}=0.772$; $\text{CFI}=0.934$; $\text{RMSEA}=0.062$) is significantly worse at 99% ($\Delta\text{Chi2} (\text{df}=11)=275.93$; $p\text{-value}<0.0001$).

With regard to internal consistency of the constructs (see Table 2.5), the composite reliability indices were all above the minimum recommended level of 0.7 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988); variance extracted values also exceeded the minimum recommended level of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

In the next stage, measurement scale validity was assessed. Convergent validity is contrasted, since all loading factors were significant and above 0.6 (Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991), as shown in Table 2.5. With regard to discriminant validity, the correlations between each pair of latent constructs were lower than the square root of AVE (see Table 2.6). Moreover, discriminant validity was confirmed via the Chi2 difference test, comparing model estimation by restricting correlations to the unit and the unrestricted model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Results for the $\Delta\text{Chi2} (\text{df}=21)=566.05$ statistic were at 99% ($p\text{-value} <0.0001$), allowing us to affirm that each scale represents notably different concepts.

Table 2.6 Discriminant validity (descriptive statistics and correlations between factors)

	Mean	SD	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
F1. DMO-generated social media communication	5.4	1.2	<i>0.908</i>						
F2. Tourist-generated media communication	5.39	1.2	0.801	<i>0.885</i>					
F3. Destination awareness	6	0.97	0.47	0.503	<i>0.835</i>				
F4. Perceived quality of destination	6.16	0.87	0.492	0.582	0.774	<i>0.862</i>			
F5. Destination image	5.54	1.26	0.591	0.64	0.461	0.693	<i>0.875</i>		
F6. Loyalty towards destination	4.93	1.53	0.632	0.653	0.382	0.497	0.747	<i>0.812</i>	
F7. Brand engagement	5.64	0.95	0.596	0.63	0.565	0.665	0.712	0.716	<i>0.768</i>
SD: Standard deviation									
<i>The elements on the main diagonal, in italics, are the square root of the AVE.</i>									

Source: The author

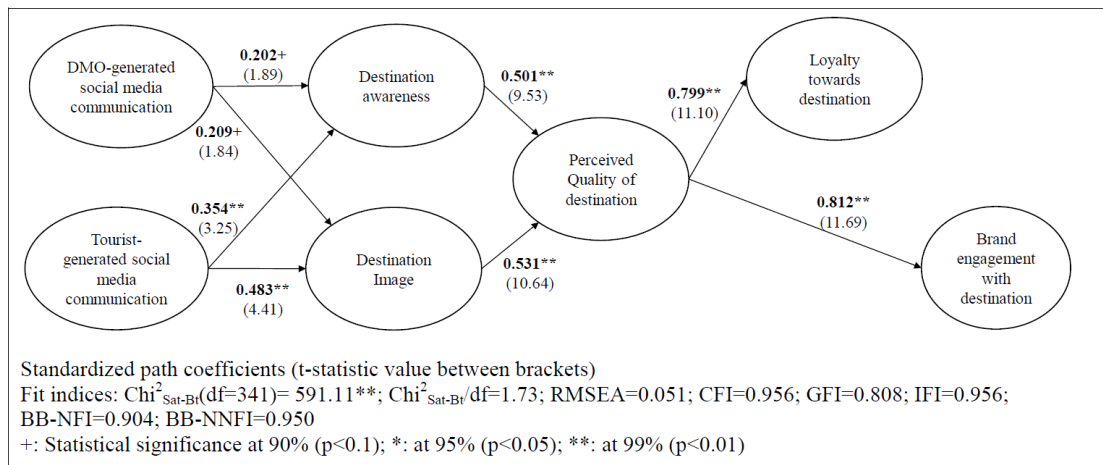
Lastly—given that the same tourist had to simultaneously assess both the endogenous variables (CBDDBE and Brand Engagement dimensions) and the exogenous variables for the model (two dimensions of social media communication)—we checked for potential common bias problems. To this end, following guidelines in Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff (2003), Harman's single factor test was used to estimate a measurement model where all observable variables loaded to a single latent factor. Adjustment indices for this estimate ($\chi^2/\text{df}=5.99$; GFI=0.444; CFI=0.697; RMSEA=0.130) were significantly worse at 99% ($p\text{-value}<0.0001$) when compared with the model pondering seven latent factors ($\Delta\chi^2 (\text{df}=21)=1150.56$). Moreover, none of the correlations between latent constructs shown in Table 2.6 are above 0.9 (Bagozzi, Yi & Phillips, 1991).

2.4.2 Structural model estimation

A structural equations model was estimated in order to contrast our research hypotheses. The two social media communication dimensions exert different degrees of impact on CBDDBE dimensions (see Figure 2.2). While all relationships are positive and significant, our data indicates that tourist-generated communication has a stronger impact on destination awareness ($\gamma=0.354^{**}$) and image ($\gamma=0.483^{**}$) than DMO-generated social media ($\gamma=0.202+$ and $\gamma=0.209+$). These results confirm H1 and H2.

With regard to the impact of the chain of effects linking CBDEB dimensions, destination awareness ($\beta=0.501^{**}$) and image ($\beta=0.531^{**}$) exhibit a significant, positive impact on perceived destination quality; hence H3 and H4 can be confirmed. Our results also support H5, as perceived destination quality has a significant impact on destination loyalty ($\beta=0.799^{**}$).

Figure 2.2 Structural equation model (SEM) estimation



Source: The autor

2.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

2.5.1 Overview

The impact of the social web in business management in general—and in a sector as competitive as tourism in particular—is unquestionable; social web technology has revolutionized the way we conceive of and manage company-client relationships. Moreover, social networks together with search and comparison platforms have completely transformed existing competitive norms. As the literature suggests, (Horn, Taros, Dirkes, Hüer, Rose, Tietmeyer & Constantinides, 2015; Shao et al., 2016) this phenomenon not only provides companies with access to global markets but empowers consumers as well. Tourists now have a wide range of information regarding availability, characteristics and accommodation prices at their fingertips—complemented by a treasure trove of fellow tourists' opinions regarding their perceptions and experiences with the destination or establishment in question. This translates as companies no longer being the sole source of information impacting brand positioning and potential consumer

behavior; a powerful new communication channel has come onto the scene—not contracted or controlled, a priori, by the company—connecting consumers from all over the world and exerting an enormous impact on final decisions. Moreover, the literature indicates that information received via social media channels garners a higher level of confidence among consumers, as it is not company-sponsored or controlled (e.g., Karakaya & Barnes, 2010).

From a brand management perspective, Aaker's and Keller's models highlight the importance of aspects other than knowledge—like strength, uniqueness and favorable disposition towards the brand, or in this case, the destination. Moreover, authors like Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000) highlight that brand equity is potentially one of the most powerful tools for predicting consumer decisions. In the specific case of the tourism sector, management of certain tangible elements helps shape destination brand image—the quality consumers perceive and communicate through different channels and verification of certain degrees of destination loyalty can be understood as brand equity-related factors (Bianchi et al., 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). Finally, as authors like Vivek et al (2012) and van Doorn et al. (2010) point out, consumers tend to feel more connected with the brand when they perceive positive relationship outcomes. In tourism contexts, therefore, we can expect brand equity to exert a positive impact on customer engagement (Ahn & Back, 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017; Hudson et al., 2015).

This phenomenon—which until now has only been studied in developed economy contexts—translates as enormous potential opportunity for emerging economy and/or emerging tourist destinations. The advent and spread of communication tools, delivering access to global markets at a reasonable cost—coupled with adequate management of factors driving brand equity—facilitate worldwide positioning of a destination, and potential creation of an engine for economic development. It is essential, therefore, to adopt a coordinated approach to working at the destination level; the focus being integrated communication management. Ensuring consistency between the products/services on offer and user perceptions of those products/services is, then, a key objective in effective brand management—since only then will company-generated communication match and complement customer UGC.

2.5.2 Theoretical contribution

Our research presents a unique aspect: namely, looking at controlled and uncontrolled communication—both separately and jointly, from the tourist's standpoint—in destination brand equity contexts. Controlled communication characterizes the conventional profile of this marketing variable; traditionally, companies determine the mix of investment, platform and channels with which they will interact with the market (Taruté & Gatautis, 2001). Hence, we can expect a positive relationship linking tourist perceptions of controlled communication and CBDBE dimensions.

Our data corroborate this idea. However, uncontrolled communication empowers customers with the ability to communicate both positive and negative content—beyond the control of firms (Eisingerich et al., 2014). Our results also confirm the impact of this type of communication on CBDBE dimensions. Our research indicates, therefore, that both types of communication—controlled and uncontrolled—have a significant impact on destination awareness and image. But we are no longer talking only about controlling channels or messages; now, companies are also left at the mercy of tourist opinions. Hence, the significant relationship linking DMO-generated contents and tourists themselves suggests that social media is a key player in terms of creating positive cognitive images of the destination. Moreover—in such a scenario—the degree of tourist satisfaction/ dissatisfaction becomes crucial to understanding message profiles. Zeithaml's seminal study (1988) highlights the key role consumer expectations play in shaping customer evaluations regarding service excellence. In this vein, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) identify the role of tangible aspects like reliability, responsiveness, security and empathy in determining perceived quality. Moreover, factors such as innovation and comparison with competitors are often recognized (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991). Thus, destination awareness and image—generated largely by created, shared content—have an indirect impact on attitudinal destination loyalty, mediated by perceived destination quality. Moreover, brand equity is a driver for successful, effective customer relations management, as Liew (2008), among others, confirm. Cambra-Fierro, Centeno, Olavarria & Vázquez-Carrasco (2017) and Sin, Tse & Yim (2005) implicitly suggest that relational strategy success can be measured in terms of customer assessments regarding level of satisfaction, declared loyalty, interest in other products offered by the company and share-of-wallet. Again, our findings are in line with the literature: we observe that brand equity becomes the antecedent of a series

of non-transactional behaviors—grouped under the umbrella concept of brand engagement—(i.e., recommendations and co-creation), that have a deferred impact on outcomes (Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo & Sesé, 2016; Sprott et al., 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010).

From a theoretical standpoint, our research proposes a holistic model designed to assess the impact of communication on brand equity. More specifically, we differentiate between company-generated controlled/ uncontrolled communication—incorporating the impact of customer perceptions on the perception of ICT-use in communication. Finally, we confirm that dimensions of brand equity have a direct impact, both on a series of relational attributes (loyalty) and on the degree of customer engagement.

2.5.3 Managerial implications

Based on our results we must, therefore, suggest that a clear idea of real objectives, capabilities and resources is indispensable; and the most efficient tools must be employed to transmit all types of communication in such a way as to have a positive impact on destination awareness and image. That said, DMOs should define clear strategies for multichannel transmission of traditional, controlled communication; yet they should also look for alternatives aimed at transmitting quality in a credible way. In a context so clearly marked by the impact of social media, encouraging active tourist participation in conveying positive messages about their experience in the destination is of the essence. We are of the opinion that technology-based efforts and investment—as proposed in the general models—are essential if emerging economy and other emerging destinations are to be empowered to effectively connect with tourists; in their absence, such destinations will not be provided with developmental support and fledgling economies will continue to flail, widening the gap even further.

From a practical standpoint, we can observe how nearly all messages issued by consumers tend to assess aspects of this nature—factors which ultimately determine brand equity as perceived by other users prior to making their own decisions. Hence, given that our data corroborate these ideas, we cannot but defend excellence-based management. We must bear in mind that the tourism sector is a classic case of a service industry and, consequently, that tourism's intangible profile requires a great deal of attention. Enhancing services by making them more tangible through excellence—

understood as adaptation to tourist expectations—is paramount. To this end, an awareness of exactly what the tourist destination has to offer is recommended, coupled with an understanding of what customers are really looking for in a given destination; quality training for sector professionals—regardless of whether they come into direct contact with the user or not—effective selection and motivation processes aimed at guaranteeing satisfactory tourist interaction and properly managed post-purchase actions, among other strategies, are also essential. Only then can we expect positive experiences, perceptions and evaluations which, in turn, bolster and enhance brand equity. On the contrary, no matter how high the investment in terms of controlled communication, the message will be inconsistent. We believe this is the shared responsibility of companies and institutions—both of whom must work together, investing in training and ICT, as well as effectively regulating the labor market.

From a practical perspective, we present an integrated management model that takes communication and brand equity management into account as fundamental factors in understanding the long-term success of a given tourist destination. We must not ignore the fact that ICT makes managing controlled communication possible; yet the same technology makes monitoring uncontrolled communication feasible as well. Such environments generate huge volumes of information (big data), including consumer profiles, attitudes, tastes, etc.—making figures like the community manager decisive, both as a spokesperson and an analyst. Moreover, to the extent that companies are able to satisfy customers and build customer-company bonds, ICT becomes a fundamental tool for facilitating co-creation processes and fostering positive customer-to-customer feedback.

That being said, we wish to highlight the importance of new technologies and uncontrolled communication in consumer-tourist behavior models. Hence, we consider it essential to accompany investment efforts with the existence of a community manager, in charge of effectively managing both company-customer and customer-company communication flows—with a view to identify and analyze the most significant trends and events in customer-to-customer communication and better understand the degree of real customer satisfaction, the needs, tastes and expectations of potential tourists, and even to keep tabs on competitor companies/destinations. The community manager profile, then, is proactive rather than reactive—both a spokesperson and an analyst.

2.5.4 Conclusions and further research

Our model demonstrates the significance of the proposed relationships; it does not, however, evaluate their possible circular effect—i.e., assess the real impact of relational behaviors on customer perceptions of controlled (e.g., credibility)/ uncontrolled communication—as to do so would require longitudinal data. This is, perhaps, our study’s main limitation: being based on cross-sectional data. Another interesting vein for future research—once the general relationships between reference model variables have been analyzed—would be to study cases for depth vis-a-vis the impact of specific tools and actions.

We believe that effective management of the variables proposed in this study would help to position certain destinations on the global playing field. Our reference hypotheses are based on studies carried out in classical developed, western economy contexts. Our proposals, on the contrary, have been tested in an emerging economy context, characterized by certain peculiarities—specifically, the tourist sector in Metropolitan Lima, regarded by many tour operators as the gateway to Peru’s hidden treasures (e.g., Machu-Pichu) and a must-see stop on any visit to the Andean country.

Our research reveals a clear call to modernize management models, foster professionalism and improve training among many sector employees and boost customer satisfaction ratios. We are convinced that a coordinated, concerted effort—with key elements of our model as a guideline—would help drive hospitality sector development, enhance the Lima brand, help shore up Peru Travel as an umbrella label and contribute to more robust growth throughout the region. Most of our conclusions can be extrapolated to other emerging economies and/or emerging tourist destinations—since, when CBDDBE is reinforced and tourists engage with the destination, we can expect positive outcomes in terms of competitiveness, internationalization, job creation, education and training, innovation, and economic development for the region, among other potential benefits.

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APPENDIX 2.I: CONSTRUCTS AND ITEM STATEMENTS

Construct	Statement	References
DMO-generated social media communication	DCC1: I'm satisfied with communication generated by destination organizations in Lima on social networks.	Adapted from Schivinski & Dabrowski (2015) and Seric & Gil (2012)
	DCC 2: The level of communication on social networks and other technologies from destination organizations in Lima meets my expectations.	
	DCC 3: Communication on social networks from destination organizations in Lima is very attractive.	
	DCC 4: Compared to social network communication from other destinations, communication generated by destination organizations in Lima is effective.	
Tourist-generated media communication	UGC1: I'm satisfied with communication generated by other tourists on social networks about Lima as a tourist destination.	Adapted from Bansal & Voyer (2000) and Schivinski & Dabrowski (2015)
	UGC 2: The content generated by other tourists about Lima on social networks is very attractive.	
	UGC 3: The content generated by other tourists about Lima on social networks provide me with different ideas about this destination.	
	UGC 4: The content generated by other tourists about Lima on social networks helps me formulate ideas about this destination.	
Destination awareness	DAW1: I can imagine what Lima is like as a tourist destination.	Adapted from Arnett et al. (2003) and Ferns & Walls (2012)
	DAW 2: I am aware of Lima.	
	DAW 3: I can recognize Lima as a tourist destination.	
Perceived quality of destination	PQD1: The quality of lodging in Lima is excellent.	Adapted from Konecnik & Gartner (2007) and Yoo et al. (2000)
	PQD2: The quality of infrastructures in Lima is excellent.	
	PQD3: Lima, as a tourist destination, offers consistent quality.	
	<i>PQD4*: The probability of Lima being reliable as a tourist destination is very high.</i>	
	<i>PQD5*: I can expect superior performance with regard to what's on offer in Lima.</i>	
Destination image	DIM1: I can visualize several characteristics of Lima as a tourist destination.	Adapted from Yoo et al. (2000)
	DIM2: Lima is different than other tourist destinations.	
	DIM3: Lima stands out above other tourist destinations.	
	DIM4: I know what Lima is.	
Loyalty towards destination	DLO1: I would like to revisit in the near future	Adapted from Yoo et al. (2000) and Im et al. (2012)
	DLO2: I would like to recommend Lima as a tourist destination to friends and acquaintances.	
	DLO3: I would still consider travelling to Lima even if the cost of the trip went up.	
	DLO4: I'm loyal to Lima as a tourist destination.	
Brand engagement with destination	BED1: I would like to share my experience in Lima with other tourists.	Adapted from Cambra et al. (2016)
	BED2: If I'm asked my opinion, I will recommend Lima without hesitation.	
	BED3: I would always give my honest opinion about Lima as a tourist destination.	
	BED4: I would like to interact with the destination organizations in Lima.	
	BED5: I would participate with the destination organizations in Lima, making suggestions or providing ideas that would improve what they have on offer.	
	BED6: I like to help other tourists to clear up their doubts regarding Lima as a tourist destination.	
<i>*Item was deleted following dimensionality analysis.</i>		

CHAPTER III:
DESTINATION
RECOVERY DURING
COVID-19

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned out to be one of the most shocking phenomena of the 21st century, seriously impacting countries and economic sectors across the board—and around the world. The travel and tourism sector has unquestionably been one of the hardest hit; border closures and mobility restrictions aimed at slowing the spread of the virus have reduced tourism and hospitality activity to marginal figures (Yang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). This can be seen, for instance, in data published by Le and Phi (2021), showing a 90% decrease in average revenue-per-available-room (RevPAR) during the second quarter of 2020.

In such a context, Zenker and Kock (2020) identify potential impact on destination image as an interesting line of research (p. 2)—based on the premise that the pandemic, and the way it is being managed in different places, affects factors like perceived safety and destination quality. From a progressive tourism recovery standpoint, previous health crises like SARS, Ebola, bird flu and influenza A—all national or regional in scope—have shown that such events negatively impact destination image. In terms of tourist destination management, both the magnitude of the health crisis and the way public and private institutions manage it—effectiveness of communication campaigns and measures aimed at guaranteeing safety at destination, for instance—will have a decisive impact on destination image and the decision to return to or avoid specific destinations (Farmaki, 2021).

This is all much more relevant for emerging economies destinations, where lower economic development and inferior healthcare infrastructures are a factor; and, in many cases, where tourism is an essential source of income for the local population—explaining why such destinations tend to be more susceptible to health crises of this sort. Hence, we believe understanding how destination image and perceived health safety impact perceived destination quality is key to proposing actions which effectively foster destination recovery. Moreover, perceived quality can also have an impact on destination loyalty and degree of engagement—understood as a set of transactional/non-transactional behaviors that both add value (van Doorn et al., 2010) and have consequences of great current and future value for the tourist destination.

In the particular case of Peru, inbound tourism dropped dramatically by more than 75% in 2020 (MINCETUR, 2020) due to border and airspace closures. The tourism and

hospitality industry plays a vital role in Peru's economy and labor market. In 2019 it accounted for just over 5% of GDP and employed almost 10% of the formal workforce (INEI, 2020). Destinations such as Machu-Pichu, Nazca and Titicaca are some of the most popular in the country; while capital city Lima, with its international airport, is the gateway to Peru and little by little is earning a reputation as destination of reference in its own right (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). The onslaught of COVID-19 has revealed the sector's enormous susceptibility to uncontrollable events—highlighting the need for creation and speedy adaptation to new systems and safety protocols, including mandatory social distancing and adapting facilities in compliance with regulations from the Ministry of Tourism and International Commerce (Mincetur, 2020), and endorsed by the Ministry of Health.

Hence, we chose Lima (Peru) as our reference for a destination analysis in an emerging economy context; an exploratory study, modeled after Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020), assessing the impact of destination image and perceived health safety on perceived quality. The authors also proposed that perceived quality impacts both potential destination loyalty and degree of customer engagement.

Kock et al. (2016) define **destination image** as tourists' cognitive, affective associations in relation to a tourist destination. These authors postulate that—in addition to the usual characteristics—recent, significant events contribute to forming tourists' image of the destination. In a health crisis scenario, perceived safety at destination is also extremely relevant. Hence, factors like safety measures and regulations aimed at preventing the spread of a disease and/or authorize return to normal activity—or the existence/lack of adequate healthcare infrastructures can impact destination image. In this vein, authors like Novelli et al. (2018, p. 76) highlight the role of *“personal and physical security perceptions [...] often fueled by the media imagery of destinations”* both in tourist decisions and global assessment of the destination.

In their respective groundbreaking studies, Zeithaml et al. (1988) and de Aaker (1996) suggest that **perceived quality** is essentially a global judgment regarding destination excellence—linked to tourists' associations in relation to a destination's infrastructure, facilities and other tangible and intangible aspects. For the purposes of this study, we define **loyalty** in terms of intent to return and/or recommend a destination to other travelers (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). Finally, **customer engagement** is a mental state of connection with a tourist destination—above and beyond the merely

transactional. Authors like van Doorn et al. (2010) and Brodie et al. (2011), see engagement as involving a very strong link fostering interaction with consumers in the form of enthusiastic social connections and possible co-creation. This type of customer behavior is extremely valuable in the quest to understand and anticipate present and future tourist destination positioning. Hence, we propose that:

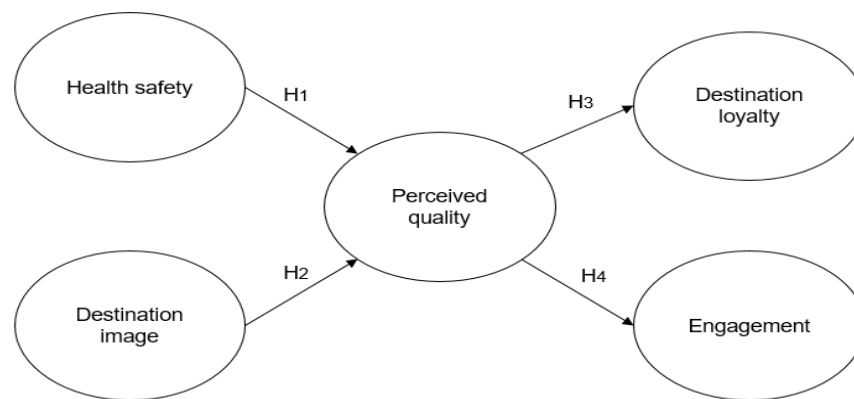
H1: Destination image has a positive impact on perceived quality.

H2: Perceived health safety at destination has a positive impact on perceived quality.

H3: Perceived quality has a positive impact on destination loyalty.

H4: Perceived quality has a positive impact on degree of customer engagement.

Figure 3.1 Theoretical model



Source: The author

Our results show relevant patterns with implications for better image management aimed at accelerating destination recovery. Recommendations are presented in the final part of this paper.

3.2 METHODOLOGY: FIELDWORK AND MEASUREMENT METHODS

This study analyzes a sample of travelers who visited Lima for work reasons during the months of December 2020 and January 2021. Our sample size is 258 travelers,

all legal adults (53.6% men; 41.6% Colombian nationality). A structured questionnaire was used, adapted from scales in Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020). Our perceived health safety scale is an adaptation of the scale proposed in Simpson et al. (2016). All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS 22 and SmartPLS 3.3.3 software.

A preliminary data analysis was carried out to test for quality. Initially, individual reliability of each item was evaluated and compared with the reference value of 0.707 proposed by Carmines and Zeller (1979). Next, we verified that Cronbach's α and composite reliability values exceeded the 0.8 minimum (Nunnally, 1978; Ringle et al., 2015). Convergent validity of the scales was also confirmed: all standardized factor loadings were greater than 0.7 and significant to their latent factor with a significance of 99%. Finally, we compared the square root of AVE for each construct with latent factor correlation values to verify that all scales showed discriminate validity. Validity was analyzed in detail using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) method (Henseler et al., 2015)—the highest correlation ratio being 0.84 between destination image and loyalty, below the maximum threshold of 0.9.

Table 3.1: Reliability Indices and Construct Correlations

CONSTRUCT	N Items	α	FC	AVE	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Destination Image	3	0.839	0.904	0.758	<i>0.871</i>				
2. Health Safety	4	0.934	0.953	0.834	0.714	<i>0.913</i>			
3. Perceived quality	3	0.944	0.964	0.899	0.581	0.681	<i>0.948</i>		
4. Destination loyalty	4	0.884	0.914	0.729	0.583	0.804	0.660	<i>0.854</i>	
5. Engagement	6	0.899	0.919	0.655	0.603	0.549	0.417	0.677	<i>0.809</i>

Source: The author

3.3 FINDINGS

Our research hypotheses were tested via an estimation of structural parameters involving bootstrapping 5,000 resampling iterations; t-statistic values and confidence intervals were used to assess the significance of causal relationships. Table 3.2 displays estimated impact figures for our theoretical model constructs.

Table 3.2: Causal Relationship Estimation

DIRECT EFFECT	STANDARD COEFFICIENT (t-Stat)	HYPOTHESIS
Destination Image → Perceived Quality	0.194* (2.20)	H1 confirmed
Perceived Safety → Perceived Quality	0.543** (7.99)	H2 confirmed
Perceived Quality → Destination Loyalty	0.660** (15.01)	H3 confirmed
Perceived Quality → Engagement	0.417** (4.77)	H4 confirmed
*Significant at 95%; **Significant at 99%		

Source: The author

Destination image and perceived health safety are significantly, positively correlated to perceived destination quality ($\gamma=0.194^*$, $\gamma=0.543^*$, respectively). Moreover, perceived quality of service at destination also has a significant impact on tourists' destination loyalty ($\beta=0.660^{**}$) and degree of engagement ($\beta=0.417^{**}$). Explained variability of destination quality via the image and security constructs is $R^2=0.482$. With regard to consequences, the explained variability of destination loyalty is $R^2=0.435$; and tourist engagement, $R^2=0.174$. Finally—with regard to the predictive capacity of our model—Stone-Geisser testing yielded positive Q^2 values for all endogenous variables. It should be noted as well that global model fit (SRMR=0.074) is adequate, falling below the established 0.08 maximum threshold (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

3.4 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE LINES OF RESEARCH

The data suggest that—in a COVID-19 context—destination image has a significant impact on perceived quality. Yet, it is also evident that perceived health safety has an even stronger impact. Clearly, a destination's general characteristics together with its tourism and hospitality infrastructures determine travelers' experience; but in health crises scenarios, it is logical to assume that perceived safety not only complements destination image but, more importantly, becomes an essential ingredient in perceived destination quality.

In such a context, an obvious recommendation is for both governments and DMOs (Destination Management Organizations) to provide—and guarantee compliance with—effective measures/protocols designed to minimize risk of contagion; adequate healthcare infrastructures and contingency plans should also exist. However, we believe effectively communicating such measures and infrastructures is at least as important when it comes to winning back visitors. Of course, traditional, formal channels exist for transmitting

information and recommendations to travelers—often institutional in nature. Yet, visitor-generated information—not controlled by the destination—can have a far greater impact on travelers’ perceptions and decisions (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). Information of this sort is readily available via the Internet and social media; it surfaces spontaneously and freely and is based on the first-hand experiences of travelers themselves. For many traveler’s visitor-generated content is more credible than the information DMOs and local governments offer.

Hence, our best advice would be to adopt a hybrid communication strategy—a two-pronged approach: on one hand providing comprehensive, updated information via destination-controlled channels and engaging proactively with travelers to answer questions or attend to issues/events that may arise during their trip/stay; on the other, carefully monitoring and analyzing visitor-generated content online. Tools like Social Web-Web 2.0, Social CRM and Natural Language Processing (NLP) allow for collecting information on target audience attitudes/behaviors and establishing two-way contact flows—with a view to impact traveler perceptions and ensure satisfactory consumer experiences at destination.

We must not forget that first-traveler perceptions will be very relevant for people thinking of traveling to the destination down the road—so early actions and messages must be solidly rooted in the reality of the destination and the evidence collected. Once optimal levels of perceived quality are achieved, our data indicate that destinations can expect positive behavior from tourists in the form of loyalty and engagement. We should keep in mind that loyalty is not only readiness to return to a destination; it also enhances likelihood of recommending the destination to other potential visitors. Customer engagement, in turn, fosters DMO-visitor interaction—facilitating intelligence-gathering on consumer experiences and direct feedback from travelers regarding destination strengths/weaknesses and proposals for improvement. All of this is highly valuable in terms of early destination reopening processes and progressive tourism recovery.

While this paper clearly contributes to the destination image management literature, several limitations must be recognized. Our study is exploratory in nature and focuses on the case of a single destination: Lima, Peru. That said, focus on an emerging destination—in a country with a tried and tested tourist tradition—makes our results of interest for management in other destinations with similar profiles. Moreover, due to mobility restrictions, our sample was comprised of travelers in Lima for work reasons.

Reason-for-travel (Farmaki, 2021) and travelers' attitudes regarding risk (Seabra et al., 2013) are factors that have an impact on destination perception. We believe other variables like frequency-of-travel and socio-demographic profile are also important when segmenting and analyzing behavior patterns.

Finally, our findings have important implications for management in other destinations as we analyze the impact of key variables on perceived quality and post-stay behavior—fundamental factors in the quest to better understand traveler decisions in pandemic and post-pandemic contexts. Hence, we propose applying this model to other destinations—including additional explanatory variables and/or segmentation of travelers based on some of the parameters already mentioned—as valuable lines for future research.

In short, our study highlights the importance of not only transmitting a destination's usual selling points but of effectively communicating pertinent health safety measures and protocols as well—especially in a post-pandemic scenario like COVID-19. From a management standpoint, keeping a close eye on visitor-generated information while developing and implementing effective communication strategies is essential. To the extent that this is achieved, DMOs can expect positive outcomes in the shape of winning back and keeping travelers in the short, mid and long term.

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CHAPTER IV:
CUSTOMER-BASED
BRAND EQUITY AND
CUSTOMER
ENGAGEMENT IN
EXPERIENTIAL
SERVICES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Given the increasingly competitive nature of business environments, service firms must find new ways to deliver value to their customers (Ostrom et al., 2015). The broad range of products and services on offer—coupled with the proliferation of contact channels—make the overall customer experience key to understanding customer-based brand equity (CBBE) and customer satisfaction. Hence, firms must pay close attention to all marketing activities aimed at providing customized experiences throughout the relationship (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2020a; Hernández-Ortega and Franco, 2019; Bolton et al., 2014) such as brand management. The Marketing Science Institute has recently highlighted brand differentiation through customer experience as a research priority for 2020-2022—especially with regard to experiential services and highly competitive markets (Kim and Lee, 2017).

A number of authors (Stein and Ramasesshan, 2020; Srivastava and Kaul, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2009) suggest that previous experiences influence intangible resources such as brand equity and reputation, as well as future decisions and experiences. When experiences are properly provided and managed, firms will be in a position both to boost customer satisfaction and build and bolster market positioning based on a solid reputation (Roberts and Dowling, 2002). Corporate reputation—linked to brand equity (Hollenbeck, 2018)—is an intangible, hard-to-imitate strategic asset, providing an excellent opportunity to respond to stakeholder expectations and foster successful experiences (Veloutsou, 2007; Hoeffler and Keller, 2003). In this way, feelings, memories, and images can be effectively linked to the brand.

Despite the impact of experiential factors on corporate reputation, the literature on the topic remains scarce, especially in emerging economy contexts. Contributions by Kandampully et al. (2018) and Khan and Fatma (2017) are notable exceptions; however in both cases, analysis is limited to developed Western economies—and existing research clearly indicates that Western marketing strategies and approaches are not necessarily effective in emerging markets (Arditto et al., 2020; Herstein et al., 2017).

Having identified this gap in the literature, the aim of the present research is twofold: on one hand, to analyze consumer perceptions regarding brand equity in highly experiential service contexts (e.g. private clinics) and on the other, to assess the impact on customer engagement. CBBE reflects how consumers think and feel about a brand

(Datta et al., 2017); hence, in the present paper, we propose that CBBE drives a chain of effects impacting corporate reputation, customer satisfaction and customer engagement.

In many developed and developing countries, healthcare is a key public service industry (Hau, 2019). In fact, the literature has identified healthcare contexts as a top service research priority (Ostrom et al., 2015). Our study is even more relevant in the current pandemic and post-pandemic world, where healthcare is an absolute priority for most people (Campbell, 2020). Public healthcare acts as a guarantor of universal access—even if some choose private sector services for general care, testing and diagnosis out of a belief that they will obtain better, more agile service (perhaps because private healthcare facilities are often better equipped with modern infrastructures and technology). In this respect, factors like brand equity and reputation determine hospital/clinic positioning, potentially having a decisive impact on patient/user decision-making and short-term intent. The novelty and overall interest of this study is also enhanced by the fact that research was carried out in an emerging economy context. In many developing countries, the public healthcare system has collapsed due to the onslaught of COVID-19 and elements like use of new technologies or adoption of respectful, patient-centered care policies—cornerstones of private healthcare—are positively impacting patient/user opinions (Traiki et al., 2020).

With a view to reach our objectives, the paper is structured as follows: section 2 presents key research variables: CBBE, corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and customer engagement. The third section illustrates our conceptual model and hypotheses development. Methodological details are provided in section 4 and results, in section 5. Our theoretical discussion, key recommendations for management and conclusions are presented in the final section of the paper.

4.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.2.1 Experiential services and branding

In line with Bolton et al. (2014) and Verhoef et al. (2009), customer experience is usually conceptualized as holistic in nature, involving customers' cognitive, affective, emotional, social and sensory responses to stimuli from firms. The term covers experiences accumulated throughout the different phases of the customer-firm relationship: search, purchase, consumption and post-consumption—and includes all

customer journey touch points (Neslin et al., 2006). This thinking is consistent with the notion that the customer's service experience is inevitably a process rather than an outcome (Yang et al., 2012).

From an experience management standpoint, cultivating proposals that enrich the customer journey and engage consumers before, during, and after purchase is essential to creating enjoyable experiences (Hernández-Ortega and Franco, 2019; de Keyser et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2009), meeting customer expectations, building loyalty and shoring up commitment (de Lima et al., 2020; Pappu et al., 2005). This is especially relevant for highly experiential services (Fuentes-Blasco et al., 2017), where meeting expectations boosts credibility, brand equity and differential competitive advantage (Krystallis and Chrysochou, 2014; Berry, 2000; Bharadwaj et al., 1993) while nurturing brand-consumer emotional connectedness (Hunter-Jones et al., 2020; Ostrom et al., 2015).

In this sense, elements like brand equity and corporate reputation act as signals that facilitate consumer decision-making processes (Tournois, 2015). Moreover, successfully engaged customers are more likely to repurchase, recommend the brand and co-create, among other effects. This is the virtuous circle we seek to analyze here, assuming that—in the case of experiential services and depending on the nature of the particular service (e.g., private healthcare clinics)—there is a risk continuum associated with the purchase decision.

Hau (2019) has recently pointed out that healthcare patients usually experience stress due to pain, anxiety, fear, and outcome uncertainty. Hence, we believe factors like CBBE and brand reputation may act as ex-ante cues to alleviate such uncertainty. Moreover, if we follow the classical construct of customer value (Zeithaml, 1988), elements like money, effort, time, opportunity, prestige, convenience and emotions all influence expectations—while factors like perceived quality, satisfaction and prestige may emerge as outcomes of service provision (Babin and James, 2010). In the case of healthcare, problem solving and achieving wellness are key to attaining user satisfaction. From this perspective, customer value is understood from a consumer experience standpoint, impacting service provider image and reputation down the line (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010; Heinonen et al., 2010).

4.2.2 From customer-based brand equity to customer engagement in experiential services: the case of emerging LATAM economies

Building a strong brand translates as significant competitive advantage (Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1991). In the case of experiential services, active consumer interaction and engagement is recommended (Boksberger and Melsen, 2011). Leone et al. (2006) and Keller (1993), among others, point out that CBBE encompasses, on one hand, consumer attitudes and actions towards the brand; and on the other, a set of associations that evoke attributes stored in consumer memory including prestige, safety, trust, loyalty, honesty, profitability and security—boosting value and enhancing image and reputation. In this vein, the extensive corpus of CBBE literature has proposed a range of dimensional conceptualizations for the construct based on seminal contributions by Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993). Aaker affirms that brand awareness, brand associations or brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty are the fundamental factors that generate added value for customers. Keller argues that CBBE occurs when consumers are familiar with a brand and make unique, favorable affective and cognitive associations—potentially impacting corporate reputation and customer satisfaction, among other elements.

Corporate reputation is a structural extension of brand concept—built over time from an accumulation of positive and/or negative perceptions regarding an organization's actions, allowing for projections about future behavior (Janney and Gove, 2011; Walker, 2010; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). A positive corporate reputation fosters favorable perceptions like prestige, honesty, responsibility, solidarity, empathy, and trust (Umasuthan et al., 2017), hence positive responses to the company (Kim et al., 2019; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). When managed effectively, reputation will become an intangible asset—nurturing a sustainable competitive advantage by providing value, prestige, and recognition to the firm (Agarwal et al., 2015). Wagner et al. (2009) suggest that a positive corporate reputation generates a favorable attitude towards company products/services (e.g., perceived quality, reliability) and certain positive post-purchase behaviors (e.g., loyalty, recommendations).

In the case of experiential services, corporate reputation is a far more relevant asset in the quest to shore up business sustainability over time (Lallement et al., 2020). Service delivery must be enriched with experiences that boost brand equity and nurture solid corporate reputation-building—a catalyst for customer engagement. To this end, generating synergistic actions is essential, across each and every dimension of brand

equity: awareness, image, perceived quality and loyalty (Keller, 1993), since the final objective is to satisfy consumers, encourage identification with the company and garner adequate levels of trust and commitment (Prentice and Nguyen, 2020; Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2019; Keiningham et al., 2017).

For all these reasons, strategies designed to generate positive consumer experiences must be implemented from the understanding that *satisfaction* is objective to a degree but fundamentally subjective and emotional in nature. The literature suggests that satisfaction surfaces when consumer experiences are rewarding, and expectations exceeded (de Lima et al., 2020; Gustafsson et al., 2005). Satisfaction powers positive relationships, yielding outcomes like loyalty, repurchase and brand recommendation (Shankar et al., 2003). Reliable brands that fulfill the value proposition, foresee and respond to consumer concerns and reinforce perceived quality in present/past consumer experiences are key to achieving satisfaction (Hernández-Ortega and Franco, 2019; Meesala and Paul, 2018; Kumar et al., 2013)—the topsoil for growing a solid corporate reputation. All of this together grows strong customer relationships which, in turn, have a positive impact on customer intentions and behaviors (Punyatoya, 2019; Su et al., 2016).

Creating lasting consumer-bonds, then, is of the essence—becoming an indispensable aspiration for service providers. Today’s consumers play a much more active role in information/recommendation-seeking and decision-making processes (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2018a). Many are even willing to co-create throughout design and service-delivery processes (Lee, 2019; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2018b). These actions are grouped under the umbrella term, *customer engagement*, defined by van Doorn et al. (2010) as a set of non-transactional behaviors springing from consumer motivational aspects, which have a deferred impact on the commercial outcome of the relationship. In such an interconnected context—in which the Internet and social media play a decisive role—the goal is no longer limited to achieving consumer satisfaction and repurchase; it also involves building an active value link to the company through behaviors such as recommendations or co-creation, reinforcing the perceived value of the experience on the part of consumers (Obilo et al., 2020; Hernández-Ortega and Franco, 2019; Álvarez-Milán et al., 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017). An active, engaged consumer, for instance, feels motivated to post positive comments online and share their satisfaction via social media Testimonials of this sort are considered more reliable and hence are more easily

remembered and more convincing than company-controlled messages (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020; de Matos and Rossi, 2008). This, in turn, contributes to boosting brand equity and building positive corporate reputation. This virtuous circle has been discussed earlier in this section and analyzed further in this paper. In the case of experiential services, every effort should be made to maximize hedonic value and strengthen satisfactory memories (An and Han, 2020)—with a view to reinforce brand equity and ensure that consumers not only come back for more (repurchase) but talk about and recommend the service on social media and elsewhere online (Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

Notably, however, most emerging LATAM economies are characterized by low scores in the long-term orientation dimension (Hofstede, 2021): Colombia, 13; Argentina, 20; Paraguay, 20; Bolivia, 25; Uruguay, 26; Peru, 25; Chile, 31. These scores reveal a relatively small propensity to save for the future and a focus on achieving quick results. They also suggest that perhaps the antecedents proposed in the literature for long-term outcomes—e.g., customer engagement—do not apply to the extent that they do in more long-term oriented cultures; hence, we could expect variations in the virtuous circle described earlier.

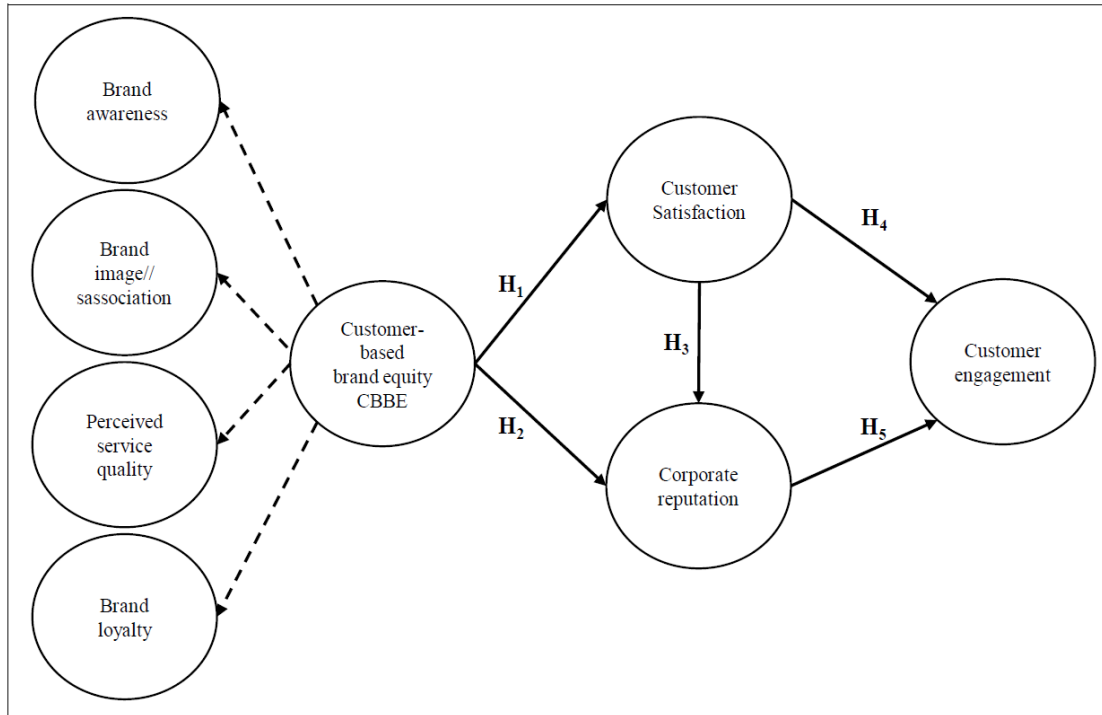
4.3 HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

This research aims to analyze the relationship between CBBE, reputation, customer satisfaction, and engagement in the context of experiential services. Social Capital Theory (SCT) allows us to integrate the set of hypotheses shown in Figure 4.1 and developed below.

SCT considers aspects linked to trust, transparency and reciprocity—together with relational elements that act as a signal, enabling us to anticipate future behaviors (Putnam, 2000, 1993; Ostrom, 1991). Social capital springs from the interaction between different agents; hence, social networks based on norms of reciprocity and trust enhance societal efficiency. For all parties involved, mutually satisfactory relationships are built on the basis of social capital (Sen and Cowley, 2013). Moreover, corporate reputation legitimizes company activity—becoming an essential intangible asset for understanding interactions with a key stakeholder: the customer. In our model, CBBE—via a chain of effects—positively impacts both corporate reputation and perceived satisfaction. These

factors, in turn, determine the degree of customer engagement in the form of reciprocal customer behavior.

Figure 4.1 Theoretical Model



Source: The author

Seminal works by Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993) highlight the importance of brand equity to understanding better positioning with respect to competitors and consumer perceptions of company products and purchasing decisions. Brand equity represents the usefulness or added value that the brand brings to a product or service (Hur et al., 2014)—thus becoming an asset that bolsters measurable and tangible benefits and contributing to growing a knowledge/value differential for both the company and the customer. CBBE guides consumers and, to some extent, equips them to anticipate quality and satisfaction (Sürücü et al., 2019). Consumers perceive that the brand itself adds value—connecting to one-of-a-kind positive associations and memories and increasing familiarity with company products/services (Keller, 1993). Higher perceived brand equity leads to higher levels of satisfaction (Brady et al., 2008; Esch et al., 2006; Zeithaml, 1988). Moreover, brand equity is a catalyst for building robust, positive corporate reputations (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004). In the case of services, in general, and experiential services, in particular, brand equity generates satisfaction and is decisive in reducing risk of adverse selection associated with purchasing decisions (Kim

and Park, 2017; Nassar, 2017; Radojevic et al., 2015). Foroudi (2019) highlights the consistency of brand equity as an antecedent to brand reputation. Take the case of healthcare services, for instance: hospital brand recognition is associated with quality of care, medical staff expertise and availability of state-of-the-art equipment to meet patient needs (Khosravizadeh et al., 2020). Based on the above arguments, we put forth the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: CBBE has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: CBBE has a positive impact on corporate reputation.

With regard to service provision, authors like Walsh and Beatty (2007) promote building corporate reputation by way of customer satisfaction. Such authors also conclude that a good reputation positively impacts customer responses, growing satisfaction-fueled value and credibility. Likewise, customer engagement involves a high degree of linkage and commitment (Brodie et al., 2011; van Doorn et al., 2010); consolidating relationships that go beyond a mere succession of transactions (Kumar and Nayak, 2018). Hence, engagement becomes the catalyst for robust long-term relationships involving repeat purchase and other high-value behaviors like posting of ‘likes’, online reviews and cocreation of products and services (Lee, 2019; Brodie et al., 2011; Calder et al., 2009). From a relationship marketing perspective, the consensus is that satisfaction is a fundamental premise underpinning consumer willingness to co-create close bonds of this sort (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2016). Moreover, from the standpoint of social capital theory, we can assume that consumers will react reciprocally when their expectations are fulfilled (Olavarriá-Jaraba et al., 2018)—a reality which firms signal via corporate reputation (a sign of confidence and promise). Hence, we propose that:

Hypothesis 3: Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on corporate reputation.

Hypothesis 4: Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer engagement.

Hypothesis 5: Corporate reputation has a positive impact on customer engagement.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.4.1 Data collection and sample

Emerging economies can be defined as countries showing speedy economic development, where government policies favor economic liberalization and free markets. Peru has been classified as an emerging economy, according to the annual Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) ranking based on major world stock indexes (2019). The MSCI numbers highlight Peru's pull and vast international trade potential: among Latin America's fastest growing economies in recent years—3rd in the 2018 Institute for Management Development's LATAM overall competitiveness ranking (just behind Chile and Mexico)—in just over 15 years, Peru's GNI per capita has tripled from \$2,010, in 2000, to \$5,970 in 2017 (The World Bank, 2019). Most recently, the literature has considered Peru as an emerging economy of reference as well (e.g., Arditto et al., 2020; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2020b; Flores-Hernández et al., 2020).

Data were collected by means of a self-administered, face-to-face questionnaire by trained interviewers. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents from among private health clinic clients. Managers at several private clinics in the Lima metropolitan area were asked to approach patients in a number of specialist treatment waiting rooms to explain the questionnaire and purpose of the study. Nineteen clinics authorized our research. Similar methods involving approaching potential respondents at reference sites have been used in previous studies to reduce sampling bias and obtain a good respondent mix (Yani-de-Soriano et al., 2019; Khong and Ong, 2014; Keillor et al., 2007). The interception method was deemed appropriate for our purposes as it enabled interviewers to screen potential respondents for eligibility and seek clarification where needed.

Field work was carried out between June and September 2018, achieving 300 complete, valid surveys with a sampling error of 5.66% ($p=q=0.5$) assuming an infinite population. The overall sample shows a slightly higher presence of women (53%). Table 4.1 lists the main characteristics of our sample.

Table 4.1 Sample Profile

Characteristic	Categories	N	%
Gender	Male	141	47.0
	Female	159	53.0
Age	18-24 years old	59	19.7
	25-35 years old	97	32.3
	36-50 years old	83	27.7
	>50 years old	61	20.3
Occupation	Student	52	17.3
	Employed	42	14.0
	Self-employed	172	57.3
	Home-maker	19	6.3
	Unemployed/retired	15	5.1
Monthly Personal Income (\$ US)	< 250	66	22.0
	250 – 1,250	113	37.7
	1,250 – 2,500	74	24.7
	2,500 – 4,000	36	12.0
	≥ 4,000	11	3.6

Source: The author

4.4.2 Measurement scales

To measure research model constructs, our questionnaire includes previously validated scales and was adapted to the private healthcare context (see Appendix I). In line with Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991), we consider the multi-item dimensions of CBBE—*awareness*: 3 items adapted from Ferns and Walls (2012) and Arnett et al. (2003); *image*: 4 items adapted from Netemeyer et al. (2004); *service quality*: 5 items adapted from Aaker (1996) and Dodds et al. (1991); and *loyalty*: 4 items adapted from Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Yoo et al. (2000). Satisfaction was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Fuentes-Blasco et al. (2017), Gelbrich (2011) and Nettet et al. (2011). Our corporate reputation scale comprised 5 items adapted from López-Pérez et al. (2017) and Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2016). Finally, customer engagement was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Cambra-Fierro et al. (2016), van Doorn et al. (2010), and Sprott et al. (2009). All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (from 1, “*strongly disagree*” to 7, “*strongly agree*”). Respondent gender and age were included as control variables.

To ensure translation equivalence, we adopted the strategy put forth in Yani-de-Soriano et al. (2019): first translating the questionnaire into Spanish for use in Peru via an iterative process of translation/back-translation by a team of bilingual speakers (Brislin

et al., 1973). A concept-driven rather than a language or translation-driven, approach was used to check for linguistic nuances (Erkut et al., 1999; Barnard, 1982).

Questionnaires were pre-tested (Douglas and Craig, 2007) to detect potential ambiguity, improve item sequencing and wording and ensure that all items worked well in an actual-use scenario (Brislin, 1986). The pre-test was conducted with 5 academic experts and 6 private healthcare patients to verify clarity of all items with a view to avoid any ambiguity in the wording. Pre-test respondents were asked whether they understood all instructions for completing the survey and if question wording was clear; they were also asked if response sheet format was appropriate, how long it took to complete and if they could provide any ideas for improving the questionnaire. Hence, our final questionnaire was the result of a rather exhaustive refining process.

4.4.3 Common bias method

Questionnaires were completed anonymously with a view to avoid common method variation problems; respondents were informed that there were no right or wrong answers. Once the information had been collected and purged, we checked for common bias problems using Harman's one-factor technique. Our results show that the dominant factor explains 18.65% of the variance, well below the recommended maximum threshold of 50%. Likewise, none of the latent construct correlations shown in Table 4.3 were above 0.9 (Bagozzi et al., 1991), and VIF values associated with the latent constructs listed in Table 4.5 were below the maximum threshold of 3.3 (Kock and Lynn, 2012). Hence, our data indicate that common method bias is not a problem in our study.

4.5 MODEL ESTIMATIONS AND RESULTS

Partial least squares (PLS) path modeling using Smart PLS 3.2.9 software was our choice for model hypothesis verification (Ringle et al., 2015). This choice is justified given that our objective was to predict customer engagement in experiential service contexts via ordinary least squares estimation—a variable on which there is only a limited body of research (Roldán and Sánchez-Franco, 2012). Moreover, this type of modeling is suitable when the measurement scales contain a small number of items (Barclay et al., 1995) and does not impose restrictions on data distribution (Chin, 1998).

4.5.1 Measurement model estimates: scale validity and reliability

First, we opted for a principle component-based estimation approach using PLS to estimate a first-order measurement model considering all reflective items towards their latent construct (Chin et al., 2013). We then assessed measurement scale reliability and internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability indicators. All first-order constructs show values for both indices above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017), as seen in Table 4.2.

As shown in Table 4.2, we were able to verify the convergent validity of measurement scales: all standardized loadings associated with observable items are significant at 99%; all average variance extracted values are greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). Likewise, discriminate validity was verified using the Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981). All correlations between pairs of latent factors are lower than the square root of the AVE for each construct (see Table 4.3). Moreover, the largest heterotrait-monotrait correlations ratio (HTMT) is 0.86, falling within the recommended threshold of 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4.2 First-order Measurement Model Estimation

First order construct	Items	St. Loading (t-Stat)
Awareness $\alpha = 0.888$; CR= 0.931; AVE= 0.817	AW1	0.892** (45.30)
	AW2	0.922** (62.03)
	AW3	0.898** (63.91)
Image $\alpha = 0.915$; CR= 0.941; AVE= 0.798	IM1	0.891** (60.45)
	IM2	0.921** (92.83)
	IM3	0.910** (76.84)
	IM4	0.850** (38.55)
Service Quality $\alpha = 0.918$; CR= 0.938; AVE= 0.753	SQ1	0.889** (54.85)
	SQ2	0.906** (71.79)
	SQ3	0.854** (37.51)
	SQ4	0.855** (46.83)
	SQ5	0.833** (36.89)
Loyalty $\alpha = 0.859$; CR= 0.902; AVE= 0.699	LO1	0.880** (48.98)
	LO2	0.870** (39.02)
	LO3	0.702** (16.20)
	LO4	0.878** (49.06)
Corporate Reputation $\alpha = 0.940$; CR= 0.954; AVE= 0.806	CR1	0.894** (55.21)
	CR2	0.850** (32.96)
	CR3	0.899** (67.96)
	CR4	0.916** (73.77)
	CR5	0.929** (90.30)

First order construct	Items	St. Loading (t-Stat)
Customer Satisfaction $\alpha = 0.957$; CR= 0.966; AVE= 0.824	S1	0.905** (65.95)
	S2	0.891** (55.06)
	S3	0.933** (102.72)
	S4	0.901** (52.39)
	S5	0.908** (74.08)
	S6	0.909** (68.12)
Engagement $\alpha = 0.901$; CR= 0.923; AVE= 0.666	CEN1	0.865** (56.79)
	CEN2	0.799** (22.95)
	CEN3	0.783** (21.36)
	CEN4	0.840** (27.95)
	CEN5	0.848** (51.29)
	CEN6	0.758** (19.13)
Note: St. loading: Standardised loading; α : Cronbach's Alpha; CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted. ** $p < 0.01$		

Source: The author

Table 4.3 Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell-Locker criterion)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Awareness	0.904								
2. Image	0.542	0.893							
3. Serv. Qual.	0.678	0.825	0.868						
4. Loyalty	0.556	0.763	0.734	0.836					
5. Corp. Reput.	0.595	0.732	0.817	0.657	0.898				
6. Satisfaction	0.555	0.764	0.787	0.778	0.799	0.908			
7. Cust. Engag.	0.542	0.640	0.598	0.541	0.610	0.635	0.816		
8. Sex (control)	0.040	-0.013	-0.015	-0.045	0.044	0.001	0.076	---	
9. Age (control)	-0.049	-0.066	-0.103	-0.116	-0.071	-0.127	-0.040	0.029	---
Note: The diagonal numbers are the square root of AVE. The rest elements show correlations between latent constructs									

Source: The author

The SRMR fit index is 0.062, below the 0.08 cut-off (Hu and Bentler, 1999), allowing us to conclude that our modeling is appropriate. Moreover, we consider CBBE to be a second-order construct, comprising the dimensions of image, awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty—in line with recent studies (e.g., Frías et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2015; Wong and Teoh, 2015)—using latent variable scores as formative higher-order construct estimation indicators (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Second-order Construct (reflective-formative)

Higher-order construct	Construct	Weights (t-Stat)	VIF
CBBE	Awareness	0.228** (4.21)	1.90
	Image	0.196** (2.64)	2.16
	Service Quality	0.567** (8.42)	2.68
	Loyalty	0.271** (4.23)	2.62
<i>Note: **p<0.01</i>			

Source: The author

As seen in Table 4.4, our weights are significant at 1% ($p<0.01$). Moreover, absence of multicollinearity issues was verified following procedure proposed by Sarstedt et al. (2019): our variance inflation factor (VIF) values are between 1.90 and 2.68—clearly below the 3.3 benchmark (Kock and Lynn, 2012).

4.5.2 Structural model estimation

With a view to verify our research hypotheses, we proceeded to estimate the causal relationships between constructs and their significance, using the bootstrapping method with a resampling of 5,000. This level of bootstrapping provides standard error and statistics for evaluating structural coefficient significance (Henseler et al., 2009). Results for path coefficients/direct effects are provided in Table 4.5, along with a number of fit indexes.

Table 4.5 Structural Model Estimation (direct effects)

Relationship	Std. Beta (t-Stat)	BCa 95% CI	Decision	VIF	f ²	Adj. R ²	Q ²
H1. CBBE→Satis.	0.834** (41.83)	[0.789; 0.868]	Supported	1.000	2.278	0.694	0.563
H2. CBBE→Corp. Reput.	0.500** (6.65)	[0.358;0.652]	Supported	3.278	0.268	0.713	0.567
H3. Cust. Satis.→ Corp. Reput.	0.382** (4.71)	[0.211;0.525]	Supported	3.278	0.156		
H4. Cust. Satis.→Cust. Engag.	0.449** (4.56)	[0.239;0.623]	Supported	2.812	0.131	0.443	0.278
H5. Corp. Reput.→Cust. Engag.	0.255** (2.63)	[0.063;0.290]	Supported	2.783	0.042		
Sex (control)→Cust. Engag.	0.078 (1.79)	[-0.012;0.157]		1.004	0.011		
Age (control)→Cust. Engag.	0.037 (0.87)	[-0.046;0.123]		1.020	0.003		
<i>Note: Std. Beta: Standardised Beta; BCa 95% CI: Bias-Corrected and Accelerated Bootstrap Confidence Interval; VIF: Variance Inflation Factor; f²: effect size; Adj.R²: Adjusted Coefficient of determination; Q²: Stone-Geisser's Q² value; **p<0.01</i>							

Source: The author

Results shown in Table 4.5 indicate that CBBE has a significant and positive effect both on customer satisfaction ($\beta=0.834$, $p<0.01$) and corporate reputation ($\beta=0.382$, $p<0.01$)—confirming research hypotheses H1 and H2. We can also affirm that customer satisfaction has a significant, positive impact on corporate reputation ($\beta=0.382$, $p<0.01$) and customer engagement ($\beta=0.449$, $p<0.01$), confirming hypotheses H3 and H4. Finally, our data show corporate reputation to have a significant, positive impact on customer engagement ($\beta=0.255$, $p<0.01$); hence, H5 is confirmed.

With regard to overall model assessment, the adjusted coefficients of determination (R^2) are greater than 0.4 (see Table 4.5)—providing sufficient support for concluding that endogenous constructs have moderate explanatory power (Hair et al., 2017). The CBBE construct, specifically, helps explain satisfaction to a large extent, as effect size (f^2) is greater than 0.35 (Cohen, 1988). Finally, satisfaction moderately explains corporate reputation and customer engagement—with f^2 values between 0.02 and 0.15 (see Table 4.5).

Predictive relevance was evaluated by means of the Stone-Geisser test (Q^2) using the re-sampling blindfolding technique. Our results for all bases show Q^2 values greater than 0, as seen in Table 4.5; hence, we confirm that our model has predictive relevance (Fornell and Cha, 1994).

Finally, we ensured there were no multicollinearity issues that could skew regression results for our model. As seen in Table 4.5, our VIF values are below the 5.0 threshold proposed by Kock and Lynn (2012), allowing us to discard this potential problem.

4.6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.6.1 Theoretical discussion

Experiential content is becoming increasingly relevant as an element of differentiation and positioning. From a consumer behavior standpoint, the way in which the purchase and/or user experience is perceived is crucial to understanding the degree of customer satisfaction (e.g., Hernández-Ortega and Franco, 2019). Rooted in this fundamental premise, our research assumes the challenge of assessing the extent to which CBBE impacts customer satisfaction, corporate reputation and—via a virtuous circle—

consumer engagement. Moreover, having chosen an emerging economy as our reference for empirical study enhances the interest of our results.

The results of this study have remained relevant and robust throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and into the post-pandemic period. Factors like CBBE and healthcare provider reputation can determine patient choice via expectations and service provision perceptions. Hau (2019) and Babin and James (2010), among others, indicate that antecedents to service provision help explain both patient decisions and perceived outcomes—having an impact, as well, on the future of service provider-user relationships and provider positioning.

Our results—derived from empirical analysis of a sample of customer opinions regarding highly experiential services (private health clinics)—demonstrate that CBBE has a decisive impact on both the degree of perceived satisfaction (H_1) and corporate reputation (H_2). Insofar as brand equity contributes to building a robust corporate reputation, which acts as a guarantor for company performance—and, in the case of experiential services, is key to reducing the risk of adverse selection (e.g., Radojevic et al., 2015)—our data are in line with ideas put forth by authors like as Sürücü et al. (2019) and Brady et al. (2008). Our study also highlights the consistency of consume satisfaction as an antecedent to corporate reputation (H_3), as Foroudi (2019) indicates. Moreover, for the context under scrutiny, the data reveal that satisfaction drives a decisive degree of customer engagement (H_4). Finally, our results confirm that corporate reputation does indeed have a significant impact on engagement (H_5).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, such results are in line with the main ideas underpinning Social Capital Theory (Sen and Cowley, 2013). Positive company-customer interactions weave social networks based on trust and reciprocity. More specifically—in the context of this study—customer satisfaction and corporate reputation legitimize company actions, becoming intangible assets explaining successful interactions and engaged customers.

The results obtained can be explained by the risk associated with the decision in question: consumers tend to be much more engaged when facing decisions regarding personal health and healthcare. Hence, it would be highly advisable to enhance service delivery with enriched experiences—with a view to positively impact customer satisfaction and corporate reputation and encourage consumer engagement. A practical

example of this is increased availability of wearable healthcare devices, for instance—one of the latest trends in private healthcare, aimed at improving user experiences (Lee and Lee, 2020). At the end of the day, all interactions and touchpoints are opportunities to boost brand equity, build reputation, and bolster customer connections.

Strikingly, the data support all proposed hypotheses. Given Peru's low score of 25 in the long-term orientation dimension (Hofstede, 2021), we had presumed that the virtuous circle from CBBE to customer engagement would vary vis-a-vis more long-term oriented cultures. Yet, our results confirm all links put forth in the chain of effects. Given that we are analyzing a highly experiential, risky, hedonic and often expensive service, high degrees of consumer engagement and income level may explain the unexpected similarity to results for more long-term oriented, developed Western economies.

4.6.2 Recommendations for best practices

In situations of great risk and uncertainty, consumers tend to choose established, well-known firms, capable of managing complex situations effectively—often firms with which they have had previous experience, or which have been recommended by other users. In such a context, building robust, lasting relationships with users is absolutely essential. This is the case of private health clinics, where highly experiential service profiles call for actions designed to shore up CBBE, with a view to engage customers.

From a business practice standpoint, customer experience strategic management analysis recommends growing customer-based brand equity aimed at sparking emotional connections capable of supporting successful business-customer relationships. It is essential, then, for companies to behave proactively and act effectively to enrich customer experiences. Business model innovation shapes customer experiences in the hopes of boosting competitiveness in changing environments and contexts displaying high degrees of intangibility and decision-associated risk.

Opportunities for positive, interactive experiences across all brand equity dimensions enhance consumer perceptions and increase the chances of satisfying customers. Experience-based economies involve changes in consumption patterns, where the search for positive interactive experiences reinforces the value of CBBE. Interest in CBBE exceeds interest in quality of service—prioritizing emotions above all else. Technology can be harnessed to personalize consumer experiences, thus enhancing customer perceptions and boosting satisfaction.

Consumers not only expect to have their needs met; expectations must be exceeded, and satisfaction increased with every purchasing experience (e.g., de Lima et al., 2020). Hence, we recommend designing strategies and actions aimed at garnering consumer loyalty and building long-term emotional bonds by way of satisfying, memorable experiences.

Another strategy is for firms to strive to place each individual customer at the forefront of their focus and align actions with consumer expectations in the quest for “tailored” services. We suggest starting with a detailed study of the characteristics, needs, tastes and expectations of each customer with a view to personalize their experience, boost brand image, and build company credibility—especially in firms that deliver highly experiential services. This approach will be more advisable in sectors like healthcare where decision-associated risk is greater; hence, the degree of customer involvement in analysis and decision-making processes is greater as well. That said, we must recognize that a disconnection may occur between what companies aim to generate in terms of experiences and what consumers actually perceive. Understanding and supporting customers better throughout analysis, decision-making, use and post-purchase processes will help bring expectations and perceived real value into closer alignment—reinforcing CBBE and creating the chain of positive effects that we put forth in our causal model.

New technologies, social and digital media, and the plethora of available channels and platforms allow for greater connectedness and interaction with consumers—providing firms numerous opportunities to support customers throughout their journey. Companies in general—and experiential service providers in particular—cannot afford to turn their backs on technology, especially so in the case of emerging economies. In the specific case of private health clinics, technology plays a very relevant role in creating and communicating CBBE. Technology is associated with innovation, efficiency and competence—images that may not only reinforce CBBE but create multiple channels and touchpoints for interacting with customers as well.

Finally, in this age of pandemic more than ever, firms are being given the opportunity to grow their brand’s differential value through empathic action and solidarity—i.e. developing a set of experiences that nurture an emotional connection and project the company’s role as a committed stakeholder who prioritizes service vocation in benefit of the common good. Strict, speedy compliance with biosafety protocols and smooth transition and commitment to addressing customer queries via remote

communication tools/digital media are two ways healthcare providers can shore up brand image and build corporate reputation—essentially showing they are on board when it comes to putting patient health and safety first. Such actions can drive changes in consumer perceptions, attitudes and warmth of the relationship, all of which are valued by many users (Curioso and Galán-Rhodes, 2020). Golinelli et al. (2020) note that COVID-19 is favoring the digital transition and many private clinics have been quick to provide effective tech solutions—bolstering the reputation of healthcare providers already enjoying a strong position by transmitting a greater sense of security to customers in this uncertain environment.

4.6.3 Conclusions

This study was carried out in the context of an emerging economy—Peru—where there is still a long way to go in terms of brand equity, in general, and experiential services in particular. Our research shows the existence of a virtuous circle from CBBE to customer engagement in a highly experiential service context—probably due to a high degree of customer engagement in analysis, decision-making and perceived outcomes. Specific customer profiles of this sort seem to explain why our findings for an emerging, short-term orientated economy are analogous to existing results for more developed Western economies.

This pioneering study allowed the authors to deepen analysis of a number of key concepts and contribute results and recommendations of interest—not only for academia but for business practice as well. However, despite the relevance of our paper and the rigor with which our empirical research was carried out, we must acknowledge certain limitations. First, since the study is based on personal opinions, some bias may be present in the data. In anticipation—following recommendations by Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Podsakoff and Organ (1986)—we adopted a series of strategies aimed at minimizing any potential bias: guaranteeing respondent anonymity, clarifying the inexistence of correct/incorrect answers and adapting previously validated scales to the context of analysis. Secondly, our sample size is around 300 responses. While initially this might seem small, the fact that it is a random sample has allowed us to effectively achieve our research objectives. Finally, our model is likely to include additional variables. Although admittedly this was not our initial objective, we believe these variables provide a solid basis for future research: replicating our study in other service industries displaying different degrees of experiential intensity would contribute to assessing the impact of

customer engagement and experiential perception on the chain of effects we propose in our model. Additionally, replicating the study in other emerging economies would strengthen conclusions and contribute to identifying additional cross-cultural patterns of interest in the field of experiential services from both a theoretical and a management perspective.

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APPENDIX 4.I: MEASUREMENT SCALES

Constructs	Items	Sources
Brand Awareness	AW1: I am familiar with the brand of this Clinic.	Adapted from Ferns and Walls (2012) and Arnett et al. (2003)
	AW2: I can recognise the brand of this Clinic, among other competitor clinics.	
	AW3: I can visualise in my mind the brand image of this Clinic.	
Brand Image/ Association	IM1: This Clinic is different from other clinics.	Adapted from Netemeyer et al. (2004)
	IM2: This Clinic stands out from other clinics.	
	IM3: This Clinic is very different from others.	
	IM4: The brand of this Clinic is unique.	
Perceived service quality	SQ1: This Clinic has high quality.	Adapted from Aaker (1996) and Dodds et al. (1991)
	SQ2: The likelihood of this Clinic being reliable is very high.	
	SQ3: The quality of this Clinic should be high.	
	SQ4: Compared to other Clinics, this Clinic, and its brand, is the best.	
	SQ5: This Clinic is innovative.	
Brand Loyalty	LO1: I consider myself loyal to this brand of Clinic	Adapted from Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Yoo et al. (2000)
	LO2: This brand of Clinic would be my first choice if I require this type of service again.	
	LO3: I would not use other brands if this brand of Clinic is not available.	
	LO4: Even if the services are available at other Clinics, I will try to use those of this brand of Clinic.	
Corporate Reputation	CR1: I think this Clinic has a good reputation.	Adapted from López-Pérez et al. (2017) and Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2016)
	CR2: I think this Clinic is well known.	
	CR3: I consider this Clinic to be admired.	
	CR4: I think this Clinic is prestigious.	
	CR5: In general, I think this Clinic has a good reputation.	
Satisfaction	S1: Overall, I am satisfied with this Clinic.	Adapted from Fuentes-Blasco et al. (2017), Gelbrich (2011) and Nettet et al. (2011).
	S2: Considering what I expect from similar clinics, I am satisfied with this Clinic.	
	S3: I think I have chosen the best Clinic.	
	S4: I am delighted to visit this Clinic.	
	S5: I appreciate that this Clinic exists.	
	S6: Using the services of this Clinic is pleasant.	
Customer Engagement	CEN1: I like to share my experience as a client of this Clinic with other clients.	Adapted from Cambra-Fierro et al. (2016), van Doorn et al. (2010) and Sprott et al. (2009).
	CEN2: I will recommend this Clinic to family and friends.	
	CEN3: I always give my sincere opinion about the services of this Clinic.	
	CEN4: I like to interact with this Clinic.	
	CEN5: I would get involved with the Clinic by making suggestions or providing ideas to improve its services.	
	CEN6: I like to help other clients resolve their queries regarding the services provided by the Clinic.	

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

5.1 RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES: OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

This doctoral thesis centers around three research objectives—analyzed in three independent studies—aimed at contributing to in-depth analysis of CBBE as it applies to highly experiential service providers in an emerging economy. The key role both company-controlled and user-generated (uncontrolled) communication play in omnichannel contexts is also highlighted. Advances in ICT mean consumers have an increasingly wide range of information about products/services at their fingertips. Tourism firms and DMOs are no longer the sole sources of information impacting brand equity and potential consumer behavior; a powerful new communication channel has entered the scene—a priori, spontaneous and uncontrolled—connecting travelers globally and displaying enormous potential for impacting final decisions.

Moreover, the literature indicates that, since it is not sponsored or controlled, information received through social media channels garners a higher level of trust among consumers (e.g., Karakaya and Barnes, 2010).

The objective in our first study (Study 1) was to identify how both DMO-controlled and tourist-generated communication impact emerging destination brand equity and relational outcomes with customers. Moreover—given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel and tourism sector (Hall, 2019; Kim and Lee, 2020)—a second objective emerged (Study 2): to assess the potential impact of destination image and perceived security on perceived destination quality. We also analyzed the extent to which perceived destination quality impacts tourists' loyalty and degree of engagement with the destination. Lastly—in Study 3—we aimed to verify the extent to which higher levels of service experientiality and consumer involvement in the buying decision process impact the relationships linking brand equity, corporate reputation and relational outcomes; we took the private healthcare clinic market as our reference.

Given that CBBE reflects the way consumers think and feel about a brand (Datta et al., 2017), we proposed that this variable drives a chain of effects that positively influence corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and brand engagement. Hence, we conclude that factors like brand equity and reputation determine healthcare provider (clinic/hospital) positioning—and that positioning can have a significant impact on patient/user decision-making.

As mentioned earlier, our doctoral research took the shape of three independent studies, with a view to meet proposed objectives. Quantitative analysis was carried out using questionnaires and our hypotheses were validated via PLS structural equation models. The novelty and interest of our studies are enhanced by the fact that they were carried out in an emerging economy context.

5.2 CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

The literature considers CBBE a fundamental factor in the case of highly experiential service markets. CBBE holds high potential for assessing marketing communication effectiveness and for providing indicators of potential performance down the line (Aaker, 1996). In this vein, we have focused on analyzing the impact of CBBE in highly experiential service markets (hospitality and health)—and how different ways of managing CBBE dimensions impact customer engagement differently. The scarcity of research analyzing this phenomenon in emerging economy contexts reinforces the interest of our doctoral thesis.

CBBE was introduced into the marketing literature by Aaker (1996, 1991) and Keller (2003) as a structured means of measuring brand performance—based on the proposition that the power of a brand resides in the minds of consumers. The groundwork for CBBE theory was laid in the seminal work of Aaker (1996, 1992, 1991) and Keller (2003, 1993). Aaker (1992) indicates that brand equity is rooted in knowledge, association, perceived quality and brand loyalty; similarly, Keller (1993) affirms that CBBE is created when consumers are familiar with the brand and sustain strong, favorable, one-of-a-kind brand associations. Keller (2003, 1993) understood CBBE as general brand knowledge comprising brand awareness and image, while Aaker (1992, 1991) incorporated five key components in his conceptualization. The first CBBE model applied to the tourism sector in general and destination image management in particular, was proposed by Konečnik (2006)—with a view to assess brand equity for two tourist destinations in Slovenia. Since, CBBE has garnered growing interest from researchers, driven by proven associations linking a number of latent variables and destination brand loyalty.

Customer engagement has aroused enormous interest in recent literature, especially. The concept is linked to various key brand performance indicators, including sales growth, product co-development and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Bijmolt et

al., 2010; Bowden, 2009). Not surprisingly, engagement can largely be generated via social media (Malthouse and Hofacker, 2010). Social network-based communication facilitates repeat customer-company interaction, strengthens the emotional, psychological and physical investment customers make in brands and organizations (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Phang et al., 2013) and fosters customer engagement (Cabiddu et al., 2014; Hudson et al., 2015). Customers engaged with online brand communities trust and feel more connected to their brands of choice, are more engaged with these brands and show higher overall brand satisfaction and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). In hospitality contexts, specifically, customer engagement has been found to drive trust, loyalty and positive brand evaluation (So et al., 2014).

It is essential, then, to thoroughly analyze CBBE dimensions: how they correlate with customer engagement and their implications for highly experiential service sectors (e.g. tourism and healthcare)—especially in emerging economy contexts, characterized by disparate levels of economic and social development. In this sense, our research is a valuable contribution to the literature.

Study 1 is unique insofar as it analyzes the impact of both controlled and uncontrolled communication from a tourist standpoint—independently and synergistically, and in an emerging economy destination brand equity context. Controlled communication is the conventional variety of this marketing variable; traditionally, firms determine the platform, communication channels and investment mix when interacting with the market. Likewise, seminal work by Zeithaml (1988) underscores the key role consumer expectations play in shaping customer evaluation of service excellence. In this vein, Parasuraman et al. (1988) identify the impact tangible aspects like reliability, responsiveness, safety, and empathy have on determining perceived quality. Hence, destination awareness and image—generated largely by shared, co-created content—have an indirect impact on attitudinal destination loyalty, mediated by perceived destination quality. Finally, brand equity is an engine for effective, successful customer relationship management. Cambra-Fierro et al. (2017) and Sin et al. (2005) implicitly suggest that relational strategy success can be measured in terms of customer valuation in the shape of satisfaction, declared loyalty, interest in other products/services offered by the company and share-of-wallet.

Findings for our first study are in line with the literature: brand equity indeed becomes antecedent to a series of non-transactional behaviors, i.e. co-creation and recommendation—grouped under the umbrella concept of brand engagement—which

have a deferred impact on outcomes (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2016; Sprott et al., 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010).

Study 2 was carried out in the COVID-19 pandemic context. We analyzed the impact of destination image and perceived safety on tourists' perceptions of destination quality; image and safety are key factors in determining degree of perceived quality—linked to travelers' perceptions regarding facilities, furnishings and other intangible aspects. We also analyzed the impact perceived quality has on destination loyalty and engagement: perceived quality influences loyalty—understood as intention to return and/or recommend to other tourists (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020); it also impacts degree of customer engagement. Authors like van Doorn et al. (2010) and Brodie et al. (2011) indicate that engagement involves a very strong connection between consumers and companies—favoring enthusiastic social interaction and potentially driving co-creation.

Finally, a destination's general characteristics and tourism/hospitality infrastructure clearly determine travelers' experiences. In health crisis scenarios, however, it is reasonable to assume that perceived safety will not only complement but become essential to a strong destination image and perceived quality. Indeed—while our findings suggest destination image has a significant impact on perceived quality—the data confirms that perceived safety does, effectively, have a more decisive impact.

Study 3 analyzes the impact CBBE and clinic reputation have on patient choice—based on their expectations and perceptions of service provision. Authors like Hau (2019) and Babin and James (2010) indicate that antecedents to service provision help explain both patients' buying decisions and perceived outcomes, also affecting relationships and provider positioning down the line. Bolton et al. (2014) and Verhoef et al. (2009) argue client experiences are generally conceptualized holistically, considering cognitive, affective, emotional, social and sensory responses to stimuli. In pandemic contexts like the present, private clinics have the opportunity to boost differential brand equity through empathetic, supportive action—i.e., via the implementation of a set of experiences that foster an emotional connection and project the role of managers as being service-oriented and committed to the quest for the common good. Moreover, strict compliance with health and safety regulations and provision/promotion of remote communication tools—together with a commitment to attending some or all queries via digital channels—are also relevant actions.

In such an interconnected context—where Internet and social networks play a decisive role—the objective is no longer solely to attain consumer satisfaction and boost

potential for repeat buying decisions; it is also to build company-customer bonds through behaviors like co-creation and/or recommendation, thus reinforcing the perceived value of consumer experiences (Obilo et al., 2020; Hernández-Ortega and Franco, 2019; Álvarez-Milan et al., 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017). Golinelli et al. (2020) point out that COVID-19 is favoring the digital transition and that many organizations have provided tech tools and digital solutions quickly and appropriately-shoring up the reputation of private healthcare clinics already enjoying a solid market position and transmitting a greater sense of security to customers in this uncertain environment. Favorable evaluations of customer experiences have a significant positive impact on loyalty intentions (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2020).

Data obtained in Study 3 suggest the existence of a positive chain of effects from CBBE to customer engagement. Our findings confirm that CBBE has a decisive impact on both degree of perceived satisfaction and corporate reputation. To the extent that it contributes to building a robust corporate reputation—serving as guarantor for company performance—brand equity is key to reducing risk of adverse selection (e.g., Radojevic et al., 2015). Our data are in line with ideas put forth by authors like Sürücü et al. (2019) and Brady et al. (2008). Our study also highlights the consistency of consumer satisfaction as antecedent to corporate reputation, as suggested by Foroudi (2019).

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS PRACTICE

Based on findings from **Study 1**, we suggest that a clear idea of real objectives, capabilities and resources is essential. Moreover, the most efficient communication tools and tactics should be used—with a view to positively impact destination awareness and image. That said, DMOs must define clear strategies for controlled communication in multichannel scenarios; in a context so clearly marked by social media, enlisting tourists in positive messaging regarding their experiences at destination is essential. As proposed in our general models, we believe solid technology-based efforts and investment are vital for other emerging economies and destinations to effectively connect with tourists.

Data from **Study 2** indicate that, in health crisis contexts like COVID-19, tourist destinations should focus efforts on generating fluid communication flow with current and potential tourists—with a view to convey a sense of safety and shore up destination image and reputation. Moreover, it is crucial to note that opinions expressed by the first travelers to return to a post-crisis destination will not only impact future evaluations as

to whether it is a destination to be considered down the line; pioneering customer comments and recommendations may influence potential tourist choices in real time as well (Li et al., 2020).

Clearly, the travel and tourism sector will have to rethink and reinforce orientation towards post-pandemic clients and new needs. This may be achieved by enhancing tourist experiences—including more attention to emerging segments following the crisis. While the duration of this transition and recovery stage is still unknown, such efforts require the very best professional talent tourism firms and entities can muster. A clear choice must be made to rebuild trust towards the destination; and to transfer that trust to all pertinent stakeholders.

Findings from our strategic customer experience management analysis (**Study 3**) call for boosting CBBE—with a view to build strong affective bonds and foster robust relationships with customers. It is essential, then, that healthcare institutions move proactively to enrich and enhance customer experiences. Business model innovations stand to have a positive impact on customer experiences; the aim being to boost competitiveness in quickly changing, highly intangible environments displaying a high degree of risk associated with the buying decision.

Delivering positive, interactive experiences at every dimension of brand equity enhances consumer perceptions and better equips healthcare institutions to satisfy customers. Experience-based management means a shift in service provision and consumption patterns, where the quest for positive, interactive experiences shores up the value of CBBE. Through technology—and making a point of going beyond service quality to make customer emotions the top priority—consumer experiences can be personalized, improving perceptions and maximizing satisfaction.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

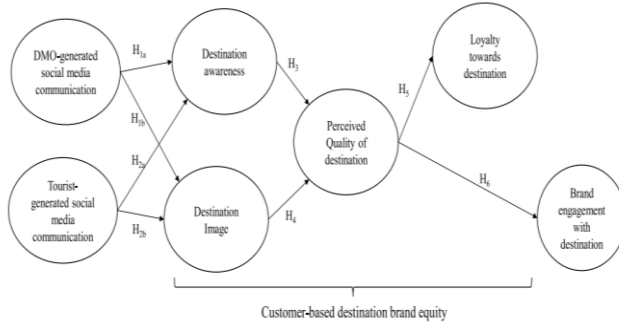
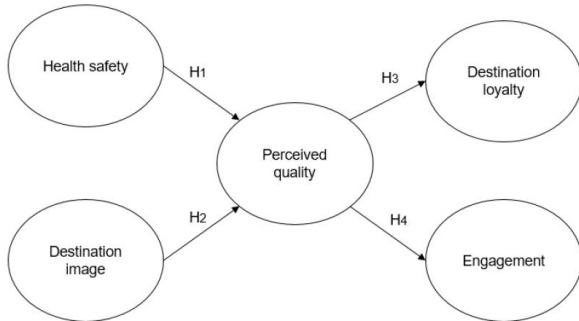
Worth noting at this juncture: the COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted both our initial objectives and research strategies. The second stage of our fieldwork required collecting data at a moment in which direct person-to-person contact was to be avoided, for instance; more than a limitation, however, this allowed us to analyze relevant up-to-date data to assess the situation of a highly experiential service market, in an emerging economy during a serious health crisis.

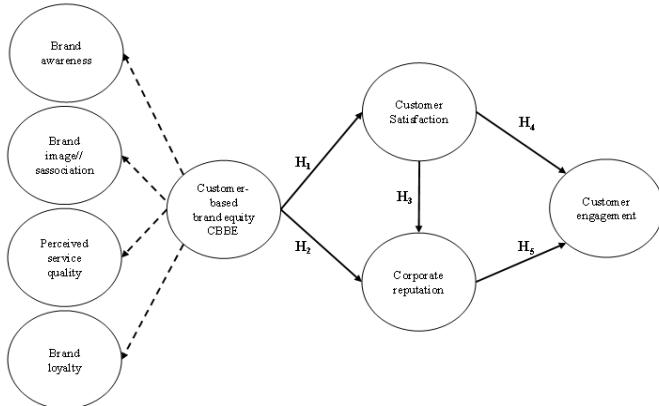
Also worth mentioning here is that we used previously-tested scales—found in the literature and adapted to our research context. It should be noted that studies of this nature can give rise to standard biases. To reduce any possible impact, the recommended guidelines were followed; techniques used include: anonymity, item simplicity and pre-tests. Statistical testing indicates an absence of bias, confirming that our data and findings are valid.

Thirdly, point out that research was carried out in a specific setting, Peru—which could limit potential for extrapolating results and implications. That said, our findings with regard to emerging economy contexts represent a significant contribution to knowledge and opportunity for future research.

Finally, in a health crisis context, analyzing a highly experiential service market and an emerging economy simultaneously constitutes a challenge, given the need for valuable proposals that include both health and safety protocols and alternatives like related services (e.g., health insurance) in the event of contagion—or proposals for medical tourism to countries implementing these alternatives with a view to reactivate the economy and promote employability. On the whole, while more specific proposals for future research are provided in each chapter, we believe that inclusion of additional variables in the proposed models could increase their explanatory power. From a cross-cultural standpoint, replicating our research in different geographical settings would also yield important findings.

Table 5.1: Implications for theory and practice

	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE
Doctoral Thesis <i>From customer-based brand equity (CBBE) to customer engagement in experiential services: insights from an emerging economy</i>	CBBE ► Perceived Quality ► Customer Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In highly experiential services communication (controlled and non-controlled) affects CBBE. - Data reveals a positive chain of effects from CBBE to customer engagement. - This chain also arises during COVID-19 (private health sector). - Firms must be aware about the impact of different types of communication in customer perceptions and behaviors.
Study 1 <i>The interplay between social media communication, brand equity and engagement in tourist destinations: an emerging economy context</i>	 <p>The diagram for Study 1 illustrates the relationships between various factors in a tourist destination context. It includes nodes for 'DMO-generated social media communication', 'Tourist-generated social media communication', 'Destination awareness', 'Destination Image', 'Perceived Quality of destination', 'Loyalty towards destination', and 'Brand engagement with destination'. Arrows indicate hypothesized relationships: H1a from DMO to awareness, H1b from DMO to image, H2a from tourist to awareness, H2b from tourist to image, H3 from awareness to quality, H4 from image to quality, H5 from quality to loyalty, and H6 from quality to brand engagement. A bracket groups 'Destination awareness' and 'Destination Image' under the label 'Customer-based destination brand equity'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both controlled and uncontrolled communication have a significant impact on tourist perceptions and destination image. - The significant relationship linking DMO-controlled content and tourists suggests that social media is a key player in terms of creating positive cognitive-affective images of the destination. - Brand equity dimensions have a direct impact both on a series of relational traits (e.g. loyalty) and on degree of customer engagement.
Study 2 <i>Tourism destination recovery in an emerging economy: impact of destination image and perceived safety during the COVID-19 pandemic</i>	 <p>The diagram for Study 2 shows the impact of health safety and destination image on perceived quality and subsequent outcomes. Nodes include 'Health safety', 'Destination image', 'Perceived quality', 'Destination loyalty', and 'Engagement'. Hypotheses are: H1 from health safety to perceived quality, H2 from destination image to perceived quality, H3 from perceived quality to destination loyalty, and H4 from perceived quality to engagement.</p>	<p>Governments and DMOs must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - initiate, and guarantee compliance with, effective measures and protocols designed to minimize risk of contagion; - provide comprehensive, up-to-date information via destination-controlled channels; - establish and maintain two-way communication flow aimed at impacting traveler perceptions and guaranteeing satisfactory experiences at destination.

	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Once the desired level of perceived quality is reached, the data indicate that destinations can expect positive tourist behaviors in the form of loyalty and engagement.
Study 3 <i>Customer-based brand equity and customer engagement in experiential service markets: insights from an emerging economy</i>	 <p>The diagram illustrates the conceptual framework for Study 3. It shows the relationships between several constructs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antecedents (Left): Four circles represent antecedents: Brand awareness, Brand image/association, Perceived service quality, and Brand loyalty. Dashed arrows point from each of these to the central construct, Customer-based brand equity (CBBE). Central Construct: A circle labeled "Customer-based brand equity CBBE" is positioned in the center. Mediators (Right): Two circles represent mediators: Customer Satisfaction and Corporate reputation. Solid arrows point from CBBE to each of these, labeled H₁ and H₂ respectively. Outcome (Far Right): A circle labeled "Customer engagement" is the final outcome. Solid arrows point to it from both Customer Satisfaction (labeled H₄) and Corporate reputation (labeled H₅). Internal Relationship: A solid arrow points from Customer Satisfaction to Corporate reputation, labeled H₃. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CBBE has a decisive impact on both degree of customer satisfaction and corporate reputation. - Customer satisfaction drives a positive degree of customer engagement. Moreover, our findings confirm that corporate reputation has a significant impact on engagement and customer participation. - Enriching services with experiences that have a positive impact on customer satisfaction and corporate reputation—hence, foster consumer engagement—is highly recommended.

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